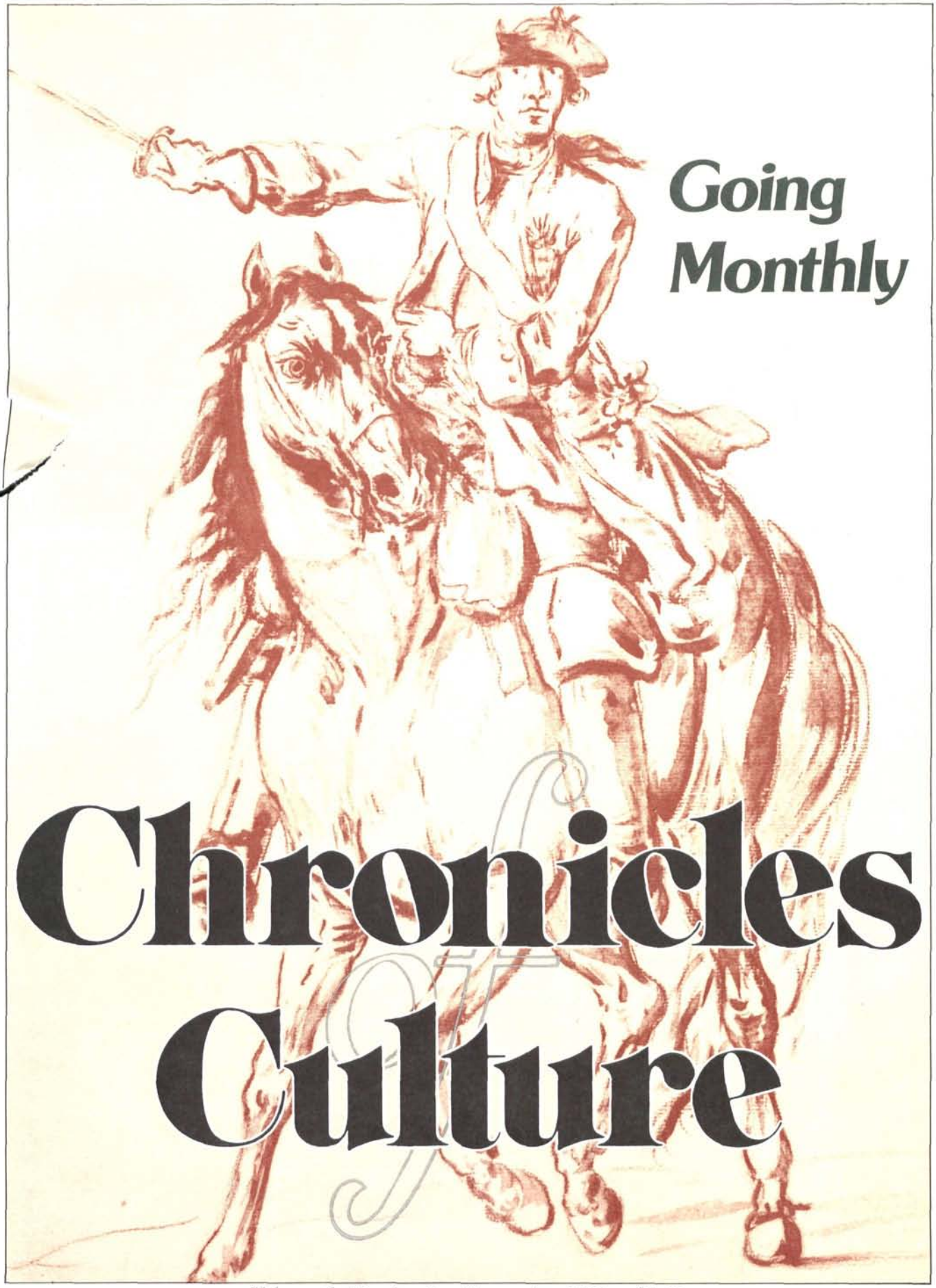

Going Monthly

# Chronicles of Culture

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# Going Monthly

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# EDITOR'S COMMENT

*Chronicles of Culture* originated as a protest against the perversion of the American culture by something we call the Liberal Culture. The marvelous cultural pluralism of the American civilization, grounded in the time-honored persuasion that the other's point of view is our common asset, has been corrupted by liberal zealotry in pursuit of a monopoly on truth. About four years ago we at The Rockford Institute felt that something should be done to redress the wrongs inflicted upon intellectual tenets that for so long, and with such prodigious achievements, had governed the American ethos as it is reflected in the national culture. We founded a bimonthly. Soon it became clear that we had found both an audience and our own image. So we recently decided to redouble our efforts and to accelerate the distribution of what we think and believe. Thus, instead of making our beliefs readable six times per year, we will be doing it twice as frequently. So here, briefly restated, is what we believe in.

The liberal polity, as it was anticipated by its 18th- and 19th-century champions, encompassed many components that we could very much appreciate. And, in reality, it did so in many respects. It evolved some invaluable concepts—representative democracy, the rule of law, voluntary social order, functional pluralism in culture (chiefly in America), the humanitarian principle. Its notions of justice and compassion came from the Judeo-Christian moral sense. Western liberal society as we know it is the end result of diverse philosophical contentions, religious hopes, ideological sensibilities and schools of thinking—from the Enlightenment treatises to the programs of old American Whigs. Notwithstanding its political vicissitudes, its basic vocabulary remained the same. Words like civilization, reason, humanity, optimism, commerce, progress, self-reliance, enterprise, individualism, responsibility constituted its framework. We have no quarrel with these words, but from them grew a culture whose sacrosanct tenet, or secular worship, became an unbounded, amorphous self-criticism which finally perverted both concepts and values, stultified them into caricatures, eradicated their commonsensical substance, reduced them—in our time—to the level of driveling nihilism. At the peak of its splendor—before the process of perversion set in—this culture was called the "bourgeois culture"; it thrived and enriched the societies that developed it. Then it extended lush privileges to those who declared that attempts to destroy it would henceforth be called art, or literature, or amusement, or free inquiry, and that's where the downward spiral began.

During the 1960's and 70's, we witnessed in America the deliberate and unabashed murder of the bourgeois culture perpetrated in the name of ideas and tenets which had been corrupted. What emerged in its stead we named the Liberal Culture—because misguided liberal sentiments must bear the responsibility for its existence. Since we had a very warm spot for the bourgeois culture at the time of its bloom—and we intensely disliked what had been proposed, or rather superimposed, to take its place—we began to publish this journal. We recognized that the Liberal Culture was actually digging the grave of our entire civilization, so we went to war.

Under what banner do we battle?

To put it succinctly, we fight beneath our own flag. Liberalism maintains nowadays that all it wants is a decent society ensuring justice and dignity for all—but so do we. Liberals say they want a polity that is responsive to human needs, that they desire material sufficiency for everybody—so do we. However, we have one stipulation: all these precious goods must come by *public* consent, not through prefabricated recipes concocted by theorists and enforced by politicians who know how to manipulate constituencies and interest groups to the detriment of a larger idea and a national entity. When liberals demand honest pluralism in culture, this is exactly what we want. But do liberals live up to their preachings? It is ob-

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vious that they long ago abandoned a pluralism based on *authentic* differences of views. By exerting a totalitarianlike grip on the opinion-forming industry, their apologists and critics are able to bar any truly opposing point of view from the pages of influential liberal journals that loudly proclaim *urbi et orbi* their pure and benign ideological nonpartisanship. Long gone is that kind of intellectual pluralism which predicated the Adams-Jefferson difference as a treasure of American political philosophy. Today, Adams's writing would run the risk of being rejected out of hand by any junior editor at any major publishing house, while Jefferson, in order to elaborate on his convictions in an atmosphere of uninhibited toleration, would need to obtain a fellowship grant from the American Enterprise Institute.

Culture is a crutch word: we use it to denote the production and distribution of ideas and images. Behind every, even the most vulgar, sitcom, there's an idea; from the sitcom comes an image. But where did the Liberal Culture come from? Did it originate in technology, in social transmutations? This is what *they* would have us believe. But culture is not the result of attitudes, it is their generator, producer, manufacturer, source. Cultures in history have prospered within a climate of contention, dissension and internal adversary forces—provided that some rules of equal opportunity and respect supported the fairness and vigorousness of the discourse. That ambiance does not exist in today's America. The dominance of the Liberal Culture is absolute in nature and totalitarian in method—especially when it comes to the distribution of images. Nonliberal thought is distorted by the firmly liberal communications media and presented as political, cultural, moral, even intellectual deviltry—without the benefit of a fair hearing, without the chance for an honest exchange of views. There are countless editorial devices and stratagems which enable the leadership of the *New York Times* or CBS to present such a procedure as evenhandedness, an Olympian impartiality in the struggle of ideas, a benevolent wisdom that transcends ideological and cultural adversities. In reality it is the manipulative and merciless suppression of another point of view—which always happens to be a nonliberal one.

It appears that, in the near future, the crucial fight will be between world views and philosophies for the human mind. This struggle will certainly take place in America, and we intend to be there on the battlefield. What we will be standing against is a culture that has disintegrated the vocabulary of ideas of the old bourgeois culture, that has stultified notions on which humankind built its hopes over millennia, conventions that throughout history have made us and our lives better. This new culture has annihilated our cherished sensibilities and trampled their remains into the morass of modern existence. It is a culture in which new catechetic words reign: liberation, entitlement, self-realization. According to the current liberal gospel, women must be liberated from their womanhood, and anyone who asks for anything makes it politically legitimate by the mere process of asking, while the pinnacle of humanness is to be found in singles bars, or freakish potential-movement happenings, or on the psychoanalytical couch. It is a culture in which behavioral slime is considered the prime element of literature, lesbianism is seen as a natural law at Princeton University, compassion has become a social regulation, fashion magazines preach revolution, and traitors to their country are presented to youth as symbols of integrity. One consequence of this culture is that a vast segment of the population is forced to work hard to support a class of parasites, many of whom—thanks to economic priorities gone berserk—have turned their lives into a grotesque *Grand Guignol* of drugs and kinky crime and who provide their own troubadors with an obscure wealth. It is a culture in which a nurse earns less per year than a cretinous, unwashed rock singer spends on dope per day. For this culture we have nothing but the deepest contempt, and we want to make it known. In the 1930's a German antifascist by the name of Kurt Tucholsky, before he was tortured by the nazis in Dachau, addressed himself to his nation in one of his last warnings: "All I wish is for you to remember, I was against!" So are we, when we face the travesty of humanness and the humiliation of reason in America.

Our first four years have convinced us that there is an audience among the young American intelligentsia whose criteria for truth, reason and intellectual honesty have *not* been shaped by *Time* magazine, or *Rolling Stone's* poetry, or *Mother Jones's* jaded, vicious socialism—often written by the scions of corporate tycoons. We do not think that the acknowledged centers of antiliberalism have the correct answer to the cultural pogrom unleashed by the vast liberal spectrum which ranges from open Soviet stooges at the Washington, D.C. radical think tanks to the jaundiced anti-Americans of *The Nation* or *Village Voice* stripe to the pseudohumanitarian parrots of the left-wing Republican Party. *We* want to speak to that audience out there. This is why we will double the frequency of our commentary.

*—Leopold Tyrmand*

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# The Enemy Up Close

**Milton Rugoff: *The Beechers: an American Family in the Nineteenth Century;* Harper & Row; New York.**

by Clyde Wilson

American Protestantism divides into two distinct cultural traditions dating back to colonial times. One tradition derives from New England and is Calvinist in origin; the other is Southern and Anglican. Anglican must be understood here as referring to a spirit rather than a structure, the structure having been largely dissolved by the American frontier.

This dichotomy has gone largely unnoticed for several reasons. For one thing, it does not follow denominational lines. Also, though the latter tradition may include more adherents, the former has had better publicity, greater prestige, more get-up-and-go. Many Americans scarcely know that the second tradition exists and think that the first *is* American Protestantism. The New England tradition is Puritan, that is, disciplined, communal and concerned with the "purification" of the community. It is parent to the American civil religion, a fact easily demonstrated by the allusions in Presidential inaugural addresses to America as "a city upon a hill."

The Southern tradition is largely folkish and focuses upon the individual and the state of his soul. It goes quietly about its work and is forebearing toward the mote in its neighbor's eye. Its evidences, being largely manifested in private life and often among people beneath the notice of intellectuals, are seldom recorded by either contemporary observers or historians. Because of the ignorance of the intellectuals, its presence and significance have been greatly underestimated in American history.

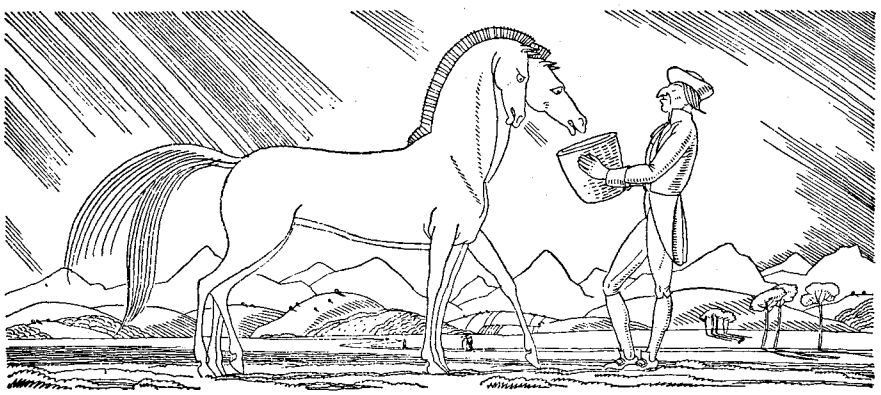
*Dr. Wilson is professor of history at the University of South Carolina and associate editor of* The Southern Partisan.

One can grasp the distinction between these two varieties of Protestantism by imagining two different churches on the same Sunday morning. One church is in Massachusetts, say, or Michigan. The preacher sermonizes on "World Peace" and the congregation sings "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." The other church is in rural North Carolina, or perhaps Oklahoma, or a blue-collar section of Los Angeles. The sermon is on "Salvation" and the hymn is "In the Sweet Bye and Bye."

There is no question that the first church represents far more worldly power and prestige than the other, so much so that even late-comers to these shores often imitate it, unconsciously recognizing that assimilation to the New England model is the most respectable form of Americanization. One can find American nuns whose rhetoric and political activism resemble New England Unitarianism more closely than anything in European Catholicism. Martin Luther King, a man raised in the second tradition, became, almost instantaneously, a power in the land when he shrewdly resorted to New England-style rhetoric.

To distinguish these two traditions further, one need only consider two manifestations of the divergent traditions in human behavior. As a demonstration of the Anglican tradition let's take General Lee, who reconciled the duties of a soldier with unostentatious faith and piety as successfully as is possible in an imperfect world, so successfully that he provided a model for millions of what used to be known as "Christian gentlemen." General Lee understood Christianity as an imperative struggle for personal virtue, its social relevance being that a virtuous man is always valuable to his fellows. For the contrasting example, one can find no better than Henry Ward Beecher, General Lee's contemporary and the most famous reforming preacher of his generation. Beecher understood the imperative of Christianity as one of social improvement, and personal virtue as consisting largely of being on the right political side.

Milton Rugoff's thorough and intimate history of three generations of Beechers is an admiring but candid account of a brilliant, energetic and forceful family. His treatment of the Beechers shows the transformation of American society in the 19th century from Puritanism to Victorianism. Rugoff's book also offers a close-up view of the first of the two Protestant traditions and of how it was transformed, by virtue of the Civil War, from a peculiarity of New England into the American tradition. The intellectual, spiritual, and public careers of the Beechers exemplify that merging of democracy and purification ritual that has provided the predominant tone of American politics right down to the pres-





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ent. First there was Lyman Beecher, the leading Calvinist theologian of his day, who was instrumental in spreading the gospel to the West. (The "West" in New England parlance referred to areas north of the Ohio River settled by New Englanders. Nothing else counted.) Among Lyman's numerous children were Catherine Beecher, a pioneer feminist; Harriet Beecher Stowe, "the little woman who made the big war," in Lincoln's phrase; Henry Ward Beecher, the most admired and highest-paid preacher of his day; and a raft of other sons, all of them reformist clergymen.

This intimate review of the Beechers not only helps one understand the 19th century, but it has a more urgent pertinence as well. Let us assume that in the future some scholar will wish to write an objective history of the 1960's and 1970's in America. (It is optimistic, I know, to hope that anyone will survive our educational debacle and declining opportunities for free speech with sufficient intellectual curiosity and ability.) The most difficult problem such a historian will face in understanding these two decades will be this: How did it happen that during that epoch such a large number of people with low ethical and moral standards and transparently self-interested and destructive motives managed to pass themselves off as the moral leaders and benefactors of society?

This question can be answered only by looking back to the reformist movements of the 19th century and to the precedents and parallels they provided for our more recent ravagings of order and decency in the name of moral vision. The 1960's and 1970's resemble no period in American history so much as the 1850's. The keynote of both eras is irresponsible destruction and aggression in the name of democratic fulfillment. The earlier crusade, though now long hallowed by success, can be seen, when viewed through the medium of the Beechers, to have been as ambiguous in motivation and results as the later one.

The closest resemblance of the two periods is in the presence of that now-familiar intolerance and the extravagance of rhetoric and action that kicks over the traces of normal political life and postulates goals so self-evidently righteous that disagreement is *sin,* explicable only as the work of the devil. This style of politics demonizes the opposition and deifies itself. Anyone who has observed politics in this country in the last fifteen years or so understands the extent to which such violent and antirational posing has held sway in public discourse. The 1850's supply the model. From the imposing authority of his pulpit, Henry Ward Beecher exhorted young men to depart for Kansas and kill Southern settlers. This rhetoric represented more than the momentary and overwrought emotions of one man: it reflected the behavior of a large number of people and spilled over into private, apolitical matters.

When Harriet visited the South for the first time—after the war—she was quite astounded to encounter families who were kindly, cultivated, Christian *and* militant rebels. Rugoff comments: "She had seen the barbarous enemy—the face of evil—and found that his sins had left no mark on him." But the Puritan ritual of demonization had already done its work. It is not the Beechers' desire for social improvement that should trouble us, but the self-aggrandizement and disregard for consequences with which it was pursued. From the phenomenon of busing, as with other social issues, we, too, have grown familiar with absentee moralism. Henry did all he could to hasten the onset of the conflict, but during the war which he had helped to produce and in which over 600,000 men died, the famous clergyman lived in luxury in Newport and Europe.

Recall also the 1970's, when philosophical and psychological weirdness sprouted constantly from the same soil as liberal politics. Again the parallels and precedents are evident. The Beechers were almost all involved in spiritualism. Professor Stowe, Harriet's husband, had frequent "visions." Harriet, in response to the remark that the creator of Uncle Tom had never been to the South, said: "No, but it all came to me in visions, one after another, and I put them down in words." "There is no arguing with pictures," she explained on another occasion, a sentiment that would doubtless please our electronic journalists. One does not have to be a latter-day defender of slavery to recognize the disastrous consequences that ensued when people like the Beechers took slavery out of the arena of political realities in which the Founding Fathers had dealt with it and placed it in the realm of fiction, propaganda, sentimentality and emotional self-indulgence.

By now we are all familiar with the extent to which the Great Society and its various attendant crusades for justice provided a cover for private pocket-lining. One recalls various political figures who were simultaneously great civil-rights advocates and outright crooks. There seems an inescapable affinity between a certain kind of politically mobilized morality and dishonesty. Both Henry and Harriet became wealthy because of their antislavery positions. Harriet, for example, purchased a confiscated Florida plantation for a pittance. Henry's favorite money-maker was a mock slave auction that he staged over and over again. On every occasion the "slave" was young, attractive, female and almost white; there is no recorded instance of an "auction" of a male, child or ugly female "slave."

To draw a close to our catalog of precedents, there is a high correlation in both the 1850's and our own era between reformist politics of the Puritan stripe and sexual promiscuity and opportunism. We all know now that the New Frontier-Great Society epoch was marked by a cynical jettisoning of traditional sexual morality by the occupants of the seats of power, and that much of the élan that fueled the New Left in the streets, and its fellow travelers in positions of power, resulted from the euphoria of the early stages of sexual license. The rhetoric, however, was mostly about peace and



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justice.

Henry Ward Beecher, the most popular preacher in America, famous for his spellbinding crusades against slavery, liquor, the secret vice and every other evil, committed adultery with at least one woman of his congregation, a woman who happened also to be a Sunday School teacher and the wife of an admiring protégé of Beecher's. The offense itself is not so revealing as the spirit of callous exploitation with which it was carried out and the deceit and hypocrisy with which it was covered up. Beecher was warmly defended by the establishment of his day. Most of the press declared his innocence and his parishioners raised $100,000 for his legal expenses, while those who brought the charges that we now know to be true were hounded. The powers that be, then as now, rush to the rescue when their most valuable asset, their pretense of superior moral vision, is threatened. Henry's deceit in this episode was not merely a weakness displayed on one painful occasion. It was a way of life to a man whose fame and riches were built upon a conveniently abstract, unscrupulously aggressive, politically irresponsible moralizing. In his memoirs, for example, Henry lied about so simple a thing as a college debate. He recounted an occasion in which he had carried the house against a proposal for the colonization of blacks outside the United States. In fact, he had not participated in the debate in question and the procolonization side had won. Characteristically, he had falsely glorified his own role and distorted the historical record to make his antislavery stand date to a much earlier and more dangerous period than it actually did.

The story of the Beechers is that of people who proclaimed themselves the champions of freedom and morality and demonized those who disagreed, while all the time keeping their hand in the till and their eye on the main chance. The chief lesson we can learn is that there is something in the American fabric that guarantees that now and then such people will succeed outrageously. Today's secular liberals will, of course, dismiss Henry Ward Beecher as simply a typical hypocritical Protestant moralist. Yet he was one of them. He was a leading liberal of his day, a crusader not for souls but for political and social reform. He was an establishment figure, not a small-town vigilante. He spoke from a position of power and respectability from which he safely and irresponsibly rode to the outer limits every fad of his day. Beecher is not the father of the Moral Majority; he is the father of the smug establishment figures who juggle morality and sybaritic lifestyles in an everlasting shell game. Today's morality movement comes out of that other, quieter, Protestant tradition. Its adherents are the attacked, not the attackers. They are not dogmatists seeking to impose their narrow standards on more enlightened fellow citizens. They are rather provoked into defending their communities and standards from impositions by the arrogant purveyors of a false and imperialistic ethos.

That strange combination of Puritanism and democracy that wreaked so much havoc in the 19th century, having done its work and reached the natural limits of its expansion, began a retreat into narrower and less dangerous limits after the debacle of Reconstruction. Something very similar is perhaps happening now. If so, we can hope once again for leaders for whom public life, as for Lee, is an arena for the exercise of private virtue rather than, as for the Beechers, a vehicle for the social mobilization of private greed and discontent. □

# Good Guys with No Labels

**Saul Bellow: *The Dean's December;* Harper & Row; New York.**

**by Joseph Schwartz**

Saul Bellow's ninth novel is a 20th-century version of *A Tale of Two Cities,* but with a difference in that it is concerned only with "the worst of times"—i.e., the present time in which we have "foolish thoughts to think, dead categories of intellect, and words that get us nowhere." Bellow sees himself as a corrective to the Charles Dickens of "the best of times," while paying Dickens the compliment of imitating his structure. First the corrective: as worshipers of progress, the West rejects the horrible. "Our outlook requires the assumption that each of us is at heart trustworthy, each of us is naturally decent and wills the good. The English-speaking world is like this. You see it in the novels of Dickens, clearly." Next the compliment: the two cities are Chicago (London) and Bucharest (Paris), both warnings to us. "Along the Paris [read *Bucharest*] streets, the death-carts rumble, hollow and harsh." And "In England [read *Chicago*] there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify much national boasting."

Albert Corde, the protagonist, is Sydney Carton-Charles Darnay. He and his wife (Minna Raresh-Lucy Manette) go from Chicago to Bucharest because of the condition of her mother (Dr. Valeria Raresh-Dr. Manette). Valeria had welcomed the revolutionary take-over by the communists. Naively ideological, she and her husband, roses in hand, had greeted the Soviet soldiers. Later, she fell into disgrace for her dubious loyalty to the regime; she was rehabilitated but never again trusted, and is now ill unto death. The ruling revolutionary forces are arbitrary, cruel and vicious: forced labor, hallucinogenic drugs in psychiatric hospitals, sulfadiazine injections, electric shocks. The government, having a monopoly on pain, sets the pain level.

Edmund Burke's view of progress vis-à-vis the French Revolution is another ghost from the past. He is echoed in

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Corde's view that "a simple belief in progress goes with a deformed conception of human nature." Such echoes are clearly germane to Bellow's purposes; progress is one of the great issues of modernism: "the modern consciousness, that equivocal queer condition, working with a net of foolish assumptions, and so much absurd unwanted stuff lying on your heart." Richard Weaver called "progress" a contemporary "god term." The West with its learned refusal to accept catastrophe must believe in the progressive triumph of good intentions. To challenge "progress" still remains a major event in the unending war between sanity and madness. While terms like "conservative" and "liberal" may mean little to artists, it is evident that such terms evolved precisely because of fundamental attitudes toward the notion of progress. Bellow does not wish to be labeled, and for good reason. Some tried to label him after the publication of *Mr. Sammler's Planet* in an effort to diminish his integrity. He rejected such labels then, and rightly so, saying that he was not interested in the "gumming business." Bellow knows where he stands on the major issues that confront us and with which a responsible novelist is concerned. I think I know where he stands. It is, in part, the function of this essay to point out the ground on which he stands as it gives shape and purpose to *The Dean's December.* The good guys will recognize the home ground at once.

Albert Corde, dean of a university college in Chicago and former journalist of some repute, is married to a Rumanian defector, Minna Raresh, astrophysicist and mathematician. Minna receives permission to visit Valeria, her dying mother, and Albert joins her for the death vigil in Bucharest. Once there, he makes an assessment of life behind the iron curtain and in memory recounts his present troubles in Chicago. He is under fire for various reasons. He pressed the case against two blacks for the murder of a white graduate student. "Crazy with rage," he wrote two articles with "apocalyptic emotions" for *Harper's* describing Chicago, the city in front of the iron curtain, in terms no less acerbic than he was to use in describing Bucharest, the city behind the iron curtain. Most of the surface action of the novel happens in Bucharest, where Valeria's death and burial take place. The deep action, concerned as much with Chicago as with Bucharest, takes place in the mind, heart and soul of Corde—the center of consciousness. Getting to know him is crucial, for all that is seen depends upon his perception.

He is "Huguenot and Irish by descent, a Midwesterner flattened out by the prairies, a journalist and a lousy college dean." Describing himself initially as one who cannot find an adequate attitude toward things and people, he prefers a pose of studied ambiguity. But he does act (principally in Bucharest): "*His* patience was at an end. *He* had had enough. He was now opening his mouth to speak, and look out!" He begins to say what is really on his mind. Deciding to let everyone have it between the eyes, he will force everybody to undergo facts in some form. "Shall I talk? . . . I'll talk." And talk and write and protest he does. *La Corde sensible,* his tender spot, has been struck, and he speaks out like Mr. Sammler, the Bellow protagonist he most resembles, but with more bitterness and greater anger. "My modernity was all used up," a magnificent expression. Although he does not have Sammler's "Godly adumbrations" to put his anger in perspective, his outbreak is, nevertheless, like Sammler's, a recital in which the moral crisis of the West is defined. "I was speaking up for the noble ideas of the West in their American form." Like Sammler, he has the credibility of the journalist who has "a thing about objectivity." Age and experience have given him a strong preference for disinterested judgments, although he is never unaware of "the monstrous destruction the gods had unleashed." He sees at first hand the manifestations of chaos and takes "a fresh reading from them." One of our contemporaries, he is *"mon semblable, mon frere."* His sudden awareness of his dependence upon spectacles forces him to recognize "how much he was organized for observation and comprehension." What a man "he was for noticing! Continually attentive to his surroundings. As if he had been sent to *mind* the outer world, on a mission of observation and notation." Like Hawthorne's Paul Pry, he had been sent to *mind* the world.

He earns political significance (more important than it should be to him) because his passion for reality as a journalist enables him to represent it anew "as art would represent it." This phrase helps greatly to explain Corde and even more Bellow, the artist-creator of the honest journalist. Both believe that the first act of morality is to retrieve reality. An understanding of history is the first step by which the dispossessed repossess the earth. Rapists, murderers, self-lovers, junkies, liars, gratuitous vandals, those who urinate or fornicate in public, those who smirk at piety, those who smile knowingly at the antics of the ape—these have taken the earth away from men. We are the dispossessed, *mon frere,* and Corde says it is our task to recover the world that is "buried under the debris of false description or evasion." The true business of the soul in this age is to face "anguish beyond the bounds of human tolerance" without a loss of poise, knowing that it knows what it knows. "For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God,

"[It] makes it difficult for a reader who does not share Bellow's obsessions to follow him or to enjoy his mental celerity."

—*The New Republic*

". . . a novel as flat as the paper on which it is printed."

—*Mother Jones*



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that we know, that we know, we know, we know."

Corde's serious limitations are presented without varnish. He finds it almost impossible to come to terms with death. Sometimes he is petulantly cranky and sometimes painfully self-righteous. Bellow slips when trying to make an activist of him. The good motive is short-sighted. Corde is a seer; he is what he is for reasons that far transcend mere activism. With remarkable understanding Bellow himself describes what I feel is his most serious thematic flaw: "Because of the incompleteness of his argument he confused many readers." The moments for the disclosure of his values are often insufficiently highlighted. All in all, however, Corde is a man of passion, experience, good will and trustworthy insight. Albert—"illustrious through nobility." Fair enough.

What does the seer see? "A mass of data, terrible, murderous." Bellow has never been so angry. Pictures of screaming children, their faces "covered with gobs of semen." People doused with gasoline and set afire in housing project elevators. Rapes in broad daylight on the seats of CTA buses. Malevolent beatings. Kidnapped women locked in the trunks of cars so as to be readily available for repeated rapings. And beyond the viciousness, a perverted extravagance:

> Corde would have guessed a party for the newlyweds. Not at all; it was the dog's birthday party. Champagne, sturgeon, lobster, Russian eggs for starters, and lunch to follow. . . . Wrapped and ribboned birthday presents were stacked beside his bed, and there were congratulatory telegrams.

His own turf, Chicago, was "a wilderness wilder than the Guiana bush." The Cordes have an alarm system on all windows and doors. Rumania, if possible, is worse. If emigration were permitted, "the country would be empty in less than a month."

The novel reaches, however, beyond Bucharest and Chicago. Bellow's ultimate target is modernism itself and its consequences. "Liberalism had never accepted the Leninist premise that this was an age of wars and revolutions." The principal ideas of liberalism were "stillborn babies of intellect. Dead, really. I realized that long ago. They originate in the brain and die in the brain." Bellow had planned a work of nonfiction about "the big scale insanities of the 20th century." After abandoning that project, he used the notes, I think, for this novel. Like the Italian *improvisatori* of 200 years ago, he gives an inspired recitation on a theme. Corde (string) is a harp through which the winds of the time pass; the music made is in the way of being a warning: he insists that moral questions must be raised. He not only raises the vital moral questions, he takes sides, and as far as liberals are concerned, he takes the wrong sides. He rejects fashionable nihilism and is contemptuous of willful aestheticism. His critique of ideological *haute couture* is devastating. His values are old-fashioned (as if values really went in and out of fashion). What he believes, quite simply, is this: We must reclaim reality, nothing more, nothing less. Reality does not exist "out there." Reality begins when "the soul [finds] its underlying truth." Internal order comes first, then one puts the house in order. Until that simple truth is understood, one cannot explain who he is or what he does. We have, instead, "whirling lives" in which there are plenty of ornaments to act as symbols, but they symbolize nothing. The soft-minded liberal is like a man on holiday who has retired from history for a while. He finds safety in the tired old maxim: "Sure, the right programs, rightly administered, would fix it." All things have "a direct material cause." Such a posture makes it impossible to take a rigorous position. Our soft nihilism does not have a chance against the hard nihilism of communism. Accused of "abyssifying," Corde responds that "this *is* the time of the breaking of nations." A sense of the "last days" makes it imperative that we "purge our understanding."

This may well be Bellow's coldest book (December), but it is not filled just with "catastrophizing." If writers warn us, as I think they do, the warning given by Bellow is both necessary and urgent. He is not a romantic who has only contempt for the world. He knows that "the

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During the 1940's he was Uncle Joe, and liberals in America would have died rather than doubt his bonhomie. During the 50's, American communists still burned incense before his portraits and were ready to stone anyone who believed Nikita Khrushchev or welcomed Alexander Solzhenitsyn. We know an East European refugee who was once asked to leave a dinner party held in a posh Central Park West penthouse: he had opined that where he came from no one saw much difference between Hitler and Stalin and suspected that the latter had murdered many more innocent people than the former.

In a recent issue of *The New Republic,* anno 1982, we could read a title: "Why Stalin Was Even Worse than Hitler." The writer in that estimable liberal organ brought everything down to cold (what a distasteful pun!) figures: Hitler annihilated some 20 million people, Stalin about 80 million. All this in the same *New Republic* where Edmund Wilson, Malcolm Cowley, Corliss Lamont . . . □



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contemporary is your only point of departure." No matter what we are like, it is "a delicious world." Bellow-Corde does not give up because "His motive . . . came out of what is eternal in man." The novel contains, like Dickens's *Tale* though not so prominently, the resurrection theme. Toby Winthrop at Operation Contact dies and is reborn in order to save those who are left (meant) to die. In a bitterly cold and uncongenial Bucharest, the cyclamen thrive like anything, even at the crematorium. A candle is lighted for Valeria, a believer, whose death is a way to life. The "sheltered, warm" Mission is visited before they go to Mount Palomar. At first the icy scientific ambiance of Mount Palomar repels him with "its power to cancel everything merely human." Corde is reminded of Valeria's funeral at the repugnant Bucharest crematorium. However, the coldness of the death house is not to be compared to the coldness of Mount Palomar. "Here the living heavens looked as if they would take you in . . . to find their real being in your own." (This ending is one of the great scenes in all of Bellow.) The huge dome parts and Corde goes up into the eye of the mighty telescope. With everything overhead in equilibrium, he begins to feel his real being. "Free!" he cries three times as he approaches the steady stars. It is cold, this going up into the sky. Does he mind it, he is asked. "The cold? Yes. But I almost think I mind coming down more." But not quite. Minna can be his representative among the bright things, so thick and close. He must come down to a mixed world in which cyclamen bloom and African violets die. It is only in the profane that the sacred can be found. That is why St. Augustine said that love calls us to the things of this world. Corde sacramentalizes the huge, technical, scientific instrument, so like a church in its structure. The cold can be bracing, even prophetic. December, the darkest time of the year, is cold and a time for waiting, and also a time when the Light comes. The death (December 24) and funeral (December 26) of Valeria take place at the height of the Christmas season. Frankly, I cannot be absolutely sure what Bellow means by all this, but my guess is that resurrection means at least as much to him as it did to Dickens. □

# Mean Anthropology & Intellectual Striptease

**Marvin Harris: *America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture;* Simon & Schuster; New York.**

**A. Bartlett Giamatti: *The University and the Public Interest;* Atheneum; New York.**

**by John C. Caiazza**

My son is three years old and, like most parents, my wife and I count on the television to act as a babysitter for him once in a while. Thus I have become acquainted with various children's television shows, especially *Sesame Street* and *Captain Kangaroo* (now *Wake Up*). I happen to prefer the *Captain* because "his" film clips are longer and less jumbled than those on *Sesame Street.* That is, *Sesame* uses the technique of patching brief swatches of film together to constitute a quick succession of scenes that are set to quick-tempoed music. This is guaranteed to keep a child's interest, but it also tends to deny a sense of continuity and coherence to the subject matter. Thus, I prefer the somewhat longer scenes and less frenetic pacing used in the films that appear on the *Captain's* shows since I can actually make sense of what is going on.

It has frequently been noted that the total experience of modern man is disconnected. The staccato discordances of contemporary film technique are merely a reflection of the general fact that our lives are divided up into discrete portions with no internal relation. Our lives seem to consist of brief segments of experience that are jammed together in chronological sequence; no other pattern is visible. The rigors of the commute in the morning are merely the discordant prelude to the succession of scenes we enact on our jobs, be it the dreary routine of the assembly line or a succession of business meetings that eat up our day, our patience and our good humor. Then there is the evening commute during which we are serenaded by our car radio with its own quick, discordant succession of commercials, pop tunes, traffic and weather reports and news (itself no more than a rapid summary of a succession of calamities). Then home, a haven in which spouse and kids and a further set of home responsibilities present their rapid claims on our dwindling time. Entertainment and art only reflect this discordance of our lives and can offer no reassurance or hope.

This succession of discordant events underlies man's lack of cohesion and inability to perceive unity and harmony in life. It is the interconnectedness of things, after all, which is the source not only of feelings of peace and serenity, but also of our sense of values and morality. If one cannot detect cause and effect between individual effort and its intended result, then one cannot apportion blame or merit. "All coherence is gone," is the leitmotif of our times and the condition of modernity. This condition of disconnectedness has been noticed by Marvin Harris and A. Bartlett Giamatti, and it is the purpose of both their books to restore our sense of it, Harris from the point of view of cultural anthropology, Giamatti from the vantage of the presidency of Yale University.

Harris's *America Now* is an attempt to explain the recent, nearly disastrous

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changes that have occurred in the United States in the last twenty years or so. Thus, besides an introduction and a conclusion, he devotes a chapter to each of seven areas of change: crime, homosexuality, the economy, cults, the women's movement, shoddiness of manufactured goods and the unwillingness of service personnel to provide service. Harris is an anthropologist who claims in this book to have explained all the changes in these areas according to changes in one basic area: the modes of economic production. That is, he asserts that since World War II the American economy has turned from producing mainly manufactured goods to producing services (he calls it "people processing"). This, combined with the entry of women into the work force in large numbers, explains all the awful changes around us. For example, Harris claims that the frightening increase in crime in our society is the result of black unemployment in the inner cities. This, in turn, is directly caused by the entry of women into the work place (they took jobs that would otherwise have gone to black teen-agers).

The difficulties with Harris's reductive schema are immediately apparent in this example, for it does not explain why crime and vandalism have spread to the affluent white suburbs. Harris, to his credit, is aware of these difficulties, but, in the end, it may not matter, for his real aim is not to explain America but to argue that what's wrong with America is a permanent condition and that there's really not much we can do that will help. The real theme of the book is expressed in the title of Chapter II, "Why Nothing Works Anymore." His pursuit of meaninglessness in the central role of America's condition leads Harris to deny consistently the real economic advances that we have made since 1945 in real income that permit a larger share of the population to own such creature comforts as cars, television sets and homes. While Harris makes many valid points, his central thesis is invalid, a trendy mixture of scientific reductionism, existential despair and radical economics. This really is a trivial book, mean-spirited, not a contribution to knowledge, not the popularization of a new idea, not even a defense of the indefensible. Harris cannot explain America, and his single solution for the trouble we are in—locally organized resistance to big business—is so forlorn that even Harris admits there's not much chance it would help.

**A.** Bartlett Giamatti's *The University and the Public Interest* is a collection of essays and speeches from the last few years (since he became the president of Yale University). Unfortunately, the book does not contain the famous—or notorious—speech he wrote on the Moral Majority. Before he became its president, Giamatti was a professor of literature at Yale, so, appropriately, his speeches are noted for their style. His style is indeed worthy of note, for it is both allusive and elusive, a kind of intellectual striptease in which veils of well-chosen words float past our eyes in a whirl of color and rodomontade, weaving a pattern of complexity and delight. But when the veils are dropped, we see a different reality than that which we were promised. The reality we discover underneath the style is just another tired liberal.

Consider, for one glorious example, "Yale and Athletics," which he delivered to a group of alumni. This literate speech contains a lucid comparison between the ancient Greek and English conceptions of the place of athletics in the education of young men, a brief discussion of John Henry Newman's idea of what constitutes a liberal education, an encomium on winning that might have made the late Vince Lombardi blush ("I think winning is important. Winning has a joy and discrete purity to it that cannot be replaced by anything else."), the etymology of the word "athlete" and one other item that no doubt was of more interest to the group of Yale alumni than even Newman's idea of a university—namely, that as President of Yale, Giamatti was cutting its varsity program from 37 to 33 varsity sports. Imagine the consternation of the Yale alumni hearing that speech; all that delightful whirling of veils woven to achieve their acquiescence to the dismemberment of Yale's athletic program.

On topics of more general interest Giamatti engages the same technique, with results equally unpleasant for the rest of us. "Power, Politics, and a Sense of History," which was delivered as a speech to the senior class of 1980, is typical. It contains a perceptive critique of Emerson on the subject of power, some enlightening comments on the separation of ideas and politics in America, several paragraphs on the need for traditions in our civic life, and a condemnation of those who use bully tactics to force their will on the American people. Just as one is anticipating a peroration condemning the arbitrary use of their power by liberal judges, Giamatti flings away the final veil to reveal a condemnation of the Moral Majority. That is, Giamatti sees more of a threat to the Republic from a Baptist preacher attacking trashy novels in the local library than he does from the state and federal courts, which, together, are currently ruling the public school system, public housing and the county jails in the city of Boston. He makes an exception if the government acts contrary to the interests of Yale University. Then Giamatti manages to sound like Edmund Burke defending the prerogatives of the French royal family, as in "Science and the University," in which he attacks the federal government's system of regulations for institutions that use federal funds to support scientific research. As President of a ma-

> ". . . the posture, the stance, of a president constantly seeking to run lines of connection between the university and the purposes of education and the issues of the larger society is admirable."
>
> —*New York Times Book Review*



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jor university, he finds them onerous: "I believe in regulation but not in leveling all distinctions and issues. The City of God is desirable but it does not occur when a landscape consists of evenly distributed rubble."

There is an air of paradox in all this constant shifting of ground, fluttering of veils, that almost constitutes evasion. Giamatti is ready for the accusation: "There is, therefore, a good deal of dealing in paradox in this collection," he says, and he is right. It is true that these are occasional pieces, not chapters in a philosophical discourse, so complete logical constancy is not to be expected. It must be noted that what is not apparent in these collected essays is any comprehensive vision of what education, especially university education, should be. Nor does Giamatti provide a link between those principles that we expect should govern a university and other educational institutions, and the principles which govern our civic lives.

Despite their avowed desire to locate a connectedness among the various elements they consider, both these authors fail to find it, perhaps because of the contradictions in each of their points of view. Another reason for their failure lies in the fact that both hold a disparaging view of religion, and religion is traditionally the means through which we try to gain a unitary view of the contradictory elements—joys, tragedies, triumphs and trials—of our experience. Harris reduces religious belief to the reaction to the perceived loss of economic security, and he provides a detailed explanation of how television pastors raise their funds from viewers. He seems to think that the greed of some religious hucksters proves that all religion is a scam. Giamatti, on the other hand, apparently perceives religion as simply a yahoo phenomenon whose only significance is in its alleged threat to academic freedom. Neither man mentions the sense of purpose, much less the access to God, that religious belief provides. Yet if they cannot deal adequately with religion, they cannot claim to have given us a comprehensive view of our personal or social lives. It is thoroughly typical of the modern temper that it disdains aid from transcendent sources while perceiving with perfect clarity the mess that we have made of our world all by our unaided selves. □

# Essays on Murder & Biography

**Diana Trilling: *Mrs. Harris;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.**

**Wilfrid Sheed: *Clare Boothe Luce;* E.P. Dutton; New York.**

**by Betsy Clarke**

Diana Trilling finds murder unappetizing, but no more unappetizing than poor taste in architecture, homely looks or social pretensions in individuals with insufficient intellectual gifts. "The bad esthetics of a society *matter* and so do the bad esthetics of an individual within the society; Tarnower's house matters, the pretensions of his diet book matter—style is a moral mode, a mode in morality," the author asserts. And since the plebeian mechanics of the criminal-justice system are ill-equipped to make these ultimate judgments about good and bad, beauty and ugliness, Diana Trilling is here to offer her services.

The Tarnower to whom she refers is, of course, Dr. Herman Tarnower, celebrated Westchester County cardiologist and author of the best-selling *The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet,* who was murdered by Jean Harris, headmistress of the posh Madeira School. Mrs. Harris had unwillingly abdicated her role as Tarnower's head mistress to the cardiologist's young nurse, and by the time of the shooting had been relegated to the position of garden-variety mistress, as had so many other women in the couple's 14-year relationship. Meanwhile, back at Madeira, Mrs. Harris was functioning unsatisfactorily, and plans were under way to remove her from her post. In addition, Mrs. Harris fretted that her expulsion of four seniors who had violated drug laws may have been inordinately severe.

Unable to recover from the depression caused by these circumstances, Harris claims she packed her gun and ammunition (about 40 rounds) and drove to New York to say good bye to her beloved Hi Tarnower and then kill herself. But when the shooting stopped, the medium-built doctor lay dying in his bedroom, and the frail Mrs. Harris had only a bruised lip. A jury rejected Mrs. Harris's contention that the shooting occurred accidentally during a struggle for the gun; they found her guilty of murder. Unbelievably, Diana Trilling brought to her task "a spirit of partisanship" favoring the headmistress, and, in fact, had planned to call this book *A Respectable Murder.* She changed her mind, not upon acknowledging that her heroine opened fire on an unarmed man, but when she learned that Mrs. Harris rather liked Tarnower's gaudy abode and good-for-nothing book. Such a woman should not be entrusted with the moral development of the young, Trilling sniffs, murderer or not.

Everything is a federal case with Mrs. Trilling except cold-blooded homicide. The doctor's pagoda and private Buddha send her into outer space: "This is what came of our winning the war in the Pacific: America now had rights on the peace of the Orient!" Nor does his diet book do much to soothe her nerves. She accuses Tarnower of dictating "the way in which we were to conform our bodies to an arbitrary consumer ideal," forgetting that the man's object was the promotion of healthy hearts, not plastic surgery.

Why, cries Mrs. Trilling in page after

*Miss Clarke is a frequent contributor to the* Chronicles.



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page, can't everyone in the world be like me? "I'm apparently alone . . ." she begins, as she expresses her disapproval of allowing high school classes to view the preliminary hearings. Trilling lets it be known that "a week's suspension and firm warning" would have been the proper punishment for the drug violators that Mrs. Harris expelled. Turning to the trial, she scolds the defense attorney for his emotional defense, for failing to introduce psychiatric testimony and for putting his client on the stand. The twelve members of the jury, according to Trilling, blew it entirely. "I don't think that Mrs. Harris was properly found guilty of murder in the second degree," the author reprimands. Can no one do anything right? On the surface, Judge Leggett seems to fare a little better when Mrs. Trilling says, "Taken in all, he's surely the best of middle America." But those of us from the Midwest recognize the remark as the ultimate put-down.

Since Diana Trilling is essentially an uninspiring writer, perhaps her insights are sparkling. But no, she has given us an incoherent, messy account of the already-overpublicized murder. On page 76, Tarnower is 5′ 10″; nine pages later he has grown an inch. Nor is legwork her long suit. She can only speculate about Jean Harris's relationship with her parents because, despite the presence in court of several of the defendant's kin, she is too lazy to meander over and inquire. Trilling has decided that Jean Harris's insecurities stem from her having been snubbed in Grosse Pointe, a theory for which there isn't a shred of evidence. Finally, Mrs. Trilling commends herself for having risen from a sickbed to observe the defendant's testimony, as if she *could* have written her book from the transcript alone.

Oddly, for all the condescending remarks about the moral bankruptcy apparent in Tarnower's house, his book, his clubs, his trips and his live-in help, Mrs. Trilling seems to be in competition with him. She feels compelled to state no fewer than three times that she has had the same cleaning woman ("servant") for 27 years. She also wants us to know that no one is her match intellectually. "Oh dear, I laugh, Dr. Ackerman mustn't cite Brecht to *me*—Brecht was the greatest moral opportunist of our intellectual century! Really?" she blurts out at one point.

What seems to get Mrs. Trilling's goat the most is that society concerns itself with obvious, mundane breaches of its moral code, such as murder, and practically ignores what she sees as the *real* symbols of a society's moral health: handsome features, classical educations, old money. By these criteria, the "reptilian" Tarnower committed numerous capital crimes, which may explain Mrs. Trilling's reflexive partisanship toward her subject. After all, the defendant merely performed a duty that any morally sensitive society would have authorized years before. When the day comes that Western justice drops its morbid preoccupation with violence and searches for judges to enforce a moral code based on esthetic ideals, well, Diana Trilling is available.

Wilfrid Sheed inaugurates his love song to Clare Boothe Luce inauspiciously: "What follows is not a biography. In fact, I'm not dead sure what it is." Whatever it might be, it is not very good. In fact, the quoted statement is typical—too much forced cleverness and not enough information.

Certainly his subject is not at fault. Born to a poor but socially ambitious mother and a largely absent father, Clare was pushed toward any wealthy, prominent bachelor who could walk and breathe at the same time. George Brokaw, husband number one, could also drink. Six years of abuse and one daughter later, Clare divorced him, received a comfortable settlement and spent the Depression years in luxury. Harry Luce, the *Time-Life* mogul, came along in 1935, by which time Clare had finished a stint as editor of *Vanity Fair* and was becoming a successful Broadway playwright. Her careers as a war correspondent, a Congresswoman, and an ambassador would follow. It was a life of adventure and professional glamor, but there was tragedy too. Daughter Ann, the only child Clare could have, died at age 19 in a freak car accident. Clare temporarily consoled herself with work. In the late 1940's, she retired temporarily and converted to Catholicism. A widow since 1967, Clare now lives in Hawaii under tight security. Half blind from cataracts, she writes speeches, works on committees concerned with foreign policy, and fights boredom.

A good novel leaves a reader hungry for more; nonfiction should sate. Sheed provides the barest skeleton of biographical information, devoid of motivation or emotion, but fails to analyze his subject's impact—all he says is that she made one. A reader interested in the bills Clare sponsored in Congress, the reviews of her plays or the story behind her unsuccessful Senate bid will have to do independent research. George Brokaw comes and goes in a few paragraphs. Clare's relationship with the Luce clan is described as icy at first and then fine, without an explanation of the transition. One unenlightening letter from Clare to Ann is supposed to give us insight into Clare's attitude toward motherhood. Even Mrs. Luce's conversion to Catholicism is slighted: Sheed sees it as, in part, a reaction to her physical estrangement from husband Harry, which makes her faith sound like a substitute for cold showers. As for Harry Luce, can the *Time-Life* giant really have been the goofy, semisenile clown that Sheed portrays?

For Sheed, Clare Booth Luce existed in a vacuum apart from mortals, issues and events. He spent the summer of 1949 at the Luce home in Connecticut after

"Mrs. Luce as filtered through Mr. Sheed may be even more interesting than the woman herself."

—*New York Times Book Review*



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Clare's religious conversion, and has never recovered. His hostess was witty, rich, beautiful and as nice to him as she could be. To be sure, Sheed is impressed with her numerous careers, but those roles are not of interest to him. Had she never been anything but a Ridgefield, Connecticut housewife, he would have wanted to write the book anyway, simply because he is crazy about her. After all, most of her prominent houseguests bore him. He identifies the issues of the day broadly (like World War II), and Clare's detractors are seen as motivated by petty jealousy rather than by honest differences of opinion. He claims that his subject envies the opportunity of Sandra O'Connor (Clare's formal education ended without even a high school diploma), but he gives us no indication of the kind of Supreme Court justice she might have been. Besides, who cares; this is not a biography, after all. What's important is that the record be set straight. Clare's reputation suggests that the woman is insufferable, whereas to Sheed she is kindness itself.

Not out of humble admiration alone does Sheed pay tribute to Clare Boothe Luce, for Sheed is in the foreground all the way. Like Diana Trilling, he writes in an overly self-conscious style ill-suited to their respective narratives. If, unlike Mrs. Trilling's, Sheed's philosophizing does not cause readers to climb the drapes, his studied casualness nevertheless betrays a lack of substance. His appraisal of his mother's opinion of Clare provides a typical example: "My very English mother . . . never quite saw the *point* of Clare, though she had no special objection (my mother never saw the point of the Japanese either)." It is humorous, but what does it mean? Later Sheed remarks, "Luce was no substitute for a religion. Space limitations and all that." Sheed's overdressed style makes the substance of his work seem all the more shabby. His organization of ideas also leaves something to be desired. Too many of the concepts parading between capital letters and periods are merely phrases masquerading as sentences. Like this. Or this. One or two can liven prose, but more begin to chop up the necessary continuity. Enough already.

Although Sheed's book is not a biography, he still promises more than he delivers. He mentions Mrs. Luce's confessional pieces in *McCall's* without elaborating on them. He vows to take up Helen Lawrenson's unflattering *Esquire* piece and Faye Henle's book on Clare, but, while both are mentioned again, illumination never comes. Any interesting idea is labeled a thought for another time.

However hurried and undeveloped it is, though, *Clare Boothe Luce* is harmless enough. The many pages of pictures, in fact, are very pleasant indeed, and those who have known the author or subject for decades may find the reminiscences satisfying. For the rest of us, Sheed's index and footnotes should lead us to the real story. □

# The Fans on Their Way to the Forum

**John Simon: *Reverse Angle: A Decade of American Films;* Clarkson N. Potter; New York.**

**Dwight Macdonald: *On Movies;* Da Capo Press; New York.**

***The Letters of Nunnally Johnson;* Edited by Dorris Johnson and Ellen Leventhal; Alfred A. Knopf; New York.**

**by Gary S. Vasilash**

In 1981 a trashy movie entitled *The Fan* appeared for a mercifully brief run. Basically, it concerns a man in his late teens or early twenties who is so taken with a Lauren Bacall-type actress (verisimilitude is enhanced by Bacall playing the role: how far the great have fallen) that in order to get close to her, he cuts and slices anyone in his way or in her general vicinity with a straight-edge razor. The moral of the story: one shouldn't see too many movies.

Film critics, of course, must see numerous movies, films, motion pictures. Although I don't think that Messrs. John Simon and Dwight Macdonald have much in common with the cretinous character in *The Fan,* I do think that the caveat of that film applies to them, as well. The danger is that one will become sickened with surfeit. Symptoms differ, but most become bilious.

Readers of movie reviews in metropolitan dailies are allowed only a synopsis of a movie, whether it is the latest Important Film by Michelangelo Antonioni or another cinematic bloodbath by John Carpenter. The newspaper movie-reviewer is writing for a tight deadline, and since a number of films are back in the can within a week, coverage must be given with great haste. The reviewer cannot afford to spend too much time thinking about what the film means—if it means anything—thus he simply provides a summary of the plot. Available time is spent generating strings of adjectives that will appear in subsequent newspaper ads or flippant remarks that will go out with the evening's trash. Too many movies and too little time make many newspaper movie-reviewers honorary graduates of the Colley Cibber School of Panegyrics and Wisecracks.

John Simon is ostensibly different. He is an erudite man who writes about films for *National Review* and other more-or-less respected publications. I suspect that his pen is not often pushed by deadlines. Simon is something of an expert on language, and his expertise is apparent not only in his work on that subject, but in his typically felicitous prose on other topics as well. He is obviously a "serious" critic. In an essay that appears in *Reverse Angle,* a collection of over 100 of his

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pieces on film written since 1970, Simon writes, "Criticism at best, of course, is only a set of subjective opinions. But it is opinions expounded at some length: explained, illustrated with examples and quotations, supported with comparisons and contrasts to other works, related to certain standards of aesthetics and even ethics, and viewed in a larger context of human life." This observation is no mere notion of the role of criticism; it is sound and studied. Whether Simon, himself, is always faithful to his own critical credo is another story. Yet his pieces on films, it would seem, are far beyond those that appear in newspapers. He sits in the mini-pantheon inhabited by the likes of Dwight Macdonald, Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris and Stanley Kauffmann. These names have a certain cachet: when we see one at the head of an essay we immediately assume that what follows is the result of a reflection on a cinematic experience, and not the slap-dash reaction of some one who has to fill a hole on the feature page.

*Diary of a Mad Housewife, Gimme Shelter, Love Story . . . The Andromeda Strain, Dirty Harry, Fritz the Cat . . . Marjoe, Billy Jack, Lost Horizon . . . The Great Gatsby, Murder on the Orient Express, The Stepford Wives*—imagine what sitting through all of these (as well as others that make these look good) will do to a person's demeanor. The slimy creep in *The Fan* became a savage from having spent too much time in the dream world of motion pictures. Newspaper movie-reviewers know that their blurbs on *Conan the Barbarian, Rocky III,* etc. will be forgotten by the next day, so they vent their spleens with cheap shots or bubble over with suffocating effervescence. Then there's John Simon. Simon saw all of those movies and the rest. They affected him, too. But—how?

They have made him not a transcendent critic, but one who is lacking in everything except a stylish manner in which to cloak either his crabby, shrewish commentaries or his vapid remarks. That is, a critic of his supposed caliber must ask at least one of two questions: What is moral? Where is truth? Simon asks neither, presumably because his aesthetic sensibility is beyond such trivialities. In this omission, he ultimately forgets to examine what is beautiful because it is, or tries to be, true and good—the one obligation of a critic on which Aristotle, Boileau, Pope and Sainte-Beuve agreed. His is a value-disoriented criticism; it has no ideological, social or ethical grounding. The result is an epistemological hollowness. Simon lacks coordinates.

Simon's criticism fundamentally consists of comments that are in the end petty and conclusions that are ultimately bankrupt. For example, he perennially bludgeons Barbra Streisand not because she is an inferior actress—presumably what a film critic would be concerned with, her faulty mimetic abilities—but because he thinks she is ugly and he cannot fathom how she can have the chutzpah to appear in public. Simon skewers Ross Hunter because he wears a toupee and knees two writers not because they have written a bad film, but because their family name is Fink. More serious than this picayune venom is the counterfeit currency that Simon passes. We would assume that it's backed with silver —if not gold—coming from such an illustrious person, but it is bogus. For example, he treats *Fritz the Cat,* an animated film released in 1972 that takes Disney-like characters and metamorphoses them into drug-taking, rutting vulgarities (this cartoon had an "X" rating), with benevolence. Simon gushes over *The Candidate* in a lengthy review in which he says: "There are two kinds of films: those that tell us what to think, and those that merely invite us to think; *The Candidate,* sensibly and sensitively, understates." How can there be meiosis in a film that continually hammers the message that all politicians are Janus-faced, especially older, successful ones? That intelligence was the key truism of the 70's. And then there's Simon's treatment of *The China Syndrome,* in his words, a "taut, intelligent, and chillingly gripping thriller," which he recommends as a "must" to see. He finds the film so engaging that he fails to recognize that it is structured on a vulgar distortion of reality and is nothing more than slick political propaganda, a gross lie. Yes, nuclear reactors can and do malfunction, but are we to believe, with the makers of *The China Syndrome,* that there is collusion between the media and the utility companies, or the media and the government, or the media and *anyone* else? If we don't accept that premise—and how could we—then it's obvious that the film is a slick fabrication passed off as social realism by those brandishing "No Nukes" placards.

Dwight Macdonald was spared many

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movies when he reviewed films for *Esquire* from 1960 to 1966. He wrote in 1963: "One of the advantages of this job is that I don't have to see many movies." This, I suppose, helped reduce his level of choler; he isn't as wont to savage someone because of his or her looks or moniker. More importantly, Macdonald's criticism is grounded on something. Macdonald was taken by the early Russian film-makers when he was a young man. Although he came to deplore the stultifying effects of communist rule on Soviet films, he remained a partisan of socialism, which is particularly evident in some of his earlier pieces. He is convincing because he is certain. A real shortcoming, however, is that he starts sounding hackneyed with his conviction that "the Hollywood director has nothing to say." He uses the word *Hollywood* as synecdoche for big business and poor films. But at least he is working from a consistent point of view, albeit a faulty one. Thus he looks for the essence of a film from *his* particular perspective; once that perspective is acknowledged, then his pieces can be seen as being ideologically sound.

The film as an art form is often compared to the novel. In an essay on *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* Macdonald explains that cinema's "macrostructure, its overall meaning, is novelistic: a story is told. In theatre this is also the case, but cinema is closest to the novel because its essence is time which can be treated in many ways . . . and because the accumulation of realistic detail is not only possible . . . but is also, as in the novel, an essential part of the medium." Simon doesn't see as close a tie between the two forms. For example, in a piece on *Play It As It Lays,* directed by Frank Perry, based on the novel of the same name by Joan Didion, Simon points out that the film "is at an immediate disadvantage vis-à-vis the novel. It has to anchor the elusive, vaguely suggestive effect of the laconic words in a specific, visually distracting place and an equally specific and limiting time, the duration of the film, which cannot, like printed paragraphs, be lingered over." Although these views are contrary, they point up an association that will eventually be forgotten once film criticism is more sophisticated. Film is to the novel what painting is to sculpture: not many consider a bust a three-dimensional portrait. The association between the two is largely based on chronology.

While the likes of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Gore Vidal periodically announce the death of the novel, it's more accurate to say that the novel is an established art form that is by no means exhausted. In the realm of literary criticism, brush wars break out on occasion, and sniping is fairly common between factions which, for example, say that Form is more important than Substance, or vice versa. At times, a new school of thought springs up and voices become strident. For the most part, however, literary criticism is at a point where the critic can be concerned with the text, the author or whatever he feels should be analyzed, rather than with other critics.

Film is still a neophyte and, consequently, film criticism is less established. There is no tradition, so film critics tend to fall back on terms from literary criticism. Since they don't like to appear de-


In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

**Toward a *Weltanschauung***

"I for one am convinced that no society can long endure which ceases to agree on ethical first principles. But to the extent that conservatives must first engage in a holding action before being able to prevail, it would, in the short run, be useful to expose their opponents as hypocrites. Social liberals are, in fact, not fighting for the expansion of freedom. And this would be the case even if one granted their spurious distinction between property rights and human ones, and conceded that human beings, save for TV scriptwriters and newspaper commentators, have no claim to freedom in the economic sphere. Liberals do not respect most people's right to live by their own light, without forced social re-education. All their aid to alternative lifestyles and aggrieved minorities has inevitably entailed the abridgement of liberty for the nonliberal family and certainly in the marketplace. Conservatives must not forego the opportunity to make this fact better known."

—from the comment by Paul Gottfried

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# In earlier epochs, a critic tormented only the writers...

*Of all the cants which are canted in this canting world—though the cant of hypocrites may be the worst—the cant of criticism is the most tormenting.*
Laurence Sterne

# In ours, he torments everybody.

Recently a middle-aged father published a book about his sordid adventures in massage parlors, wife-swapping communes and the worlds of easy sex and prostitution. The critics were grateful to Gay Talese. *Newsweek* said that "Talese's research has an awesome solidity about it." *Vogue* was proud of "... Gay's triumph over the puritanical strictures of Ocean City, strictures that so inhibited him that he didn't even masturbate until his second year in college." And the *Chicago Tribune* – a newspaper respectable primarily in its own eyes—turned its enthusiasm into promotion by running excerpts of *Thy Neighbor's Wife* for Chicagoland families to read.

The state of literary criticism today strongly confirms Laurence Sterne's warning: the cant of criticism *is* the most tormenting. To make things worse, the modern media have transformed the critic into a midwife of mass consciousness. Regardless of what we wish to know or ignore, we live with cultural events and their consequences —as interpreted by the modern critic. Sadly, what passes for "cultural criticism" in *Time, Esquire, Chicago Tribune, Ladies Home Journal,* et al., amounts to an elitist, moral shoddiness.

**The Critical Difference**

In *Chronicles of Culture,* we feel there is a need for a counterpoise to those who judge cultural offerings without giving any thought to the impact of messages which are liberated from all codes of moral and intellectual responsibility. We firmly believe that culture, books, movies, behavioral trends—their meaning and success—deeply affect man's preferences and, consequently, his sense of moral and social order. We are not timid when we confront the liberal cultural cant. *The National Review* remarked that we, *"Go for the jugular. . . . Chronicles* reports on the reporters, and reviews the reviewers. Its verdicts have not been kind."

**The Critical Response**

In every issue, we challenge the dominant cultural establishment on what it preaches about culture, politics and social matters. Malcolm Muggeridge observed that "... in *Chronicles of Culture* the Consensus assumptions—that the *New York Times* is a great newspaper, that the South Africans are uniquely the villains of our time, that President Reagan is an idiot, that all good men and true build their hopes on disarmament talks with Mr. Brezhnev, *etc. etc. etc.*—*are blissfully absent.*" Tom Wolfe said about our work, "It has been a pleasure to watch Leopold Tyrmand and the *Chronicles of Culture* confront—à la Orwell—the smelly little orthodoxies of our time." And from the *London Times,* ". . . it is a relief to receive an American publication which puts forward another view. . . . [*Chronicles*] displays a pleasantly open and ironic position. . . . Who, among the liberal monopoly of power in this sphere, will reply to Tyrmand?"

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rivative, they often mask it with infighting designed to show how little other critics know. Simon is a master at this. A sampling of some of his sallies:

> The writing, directing and acting are as amateurish as they are tendentious. . . . Yet a number of critics, including Pauline Kael, have given this sorry mess their more or less guarded approval.
>
> Nor will the objection made by Andrew Sarris hold . . .
>
> The auteur critics are, of course, fools to have made Siegel and most of their other favorites auteurs . . .

Such comments are typically reciprocated in kind. It's cockfighting in tuxedos and evening gowns. When a child is uncertain and anxious, he tends to become petulant and lash out, kicking over his two-wheeled bicycle because he hasn't mastered the technique of riding it. Many film critics are at this stage of development. It's not because they are unseasoned, but because a vocabulary of the film has yet to be fully established. They're frustrated, groping in the dark for something to say and a way to say it.

It's sometimes hard to keep in mind that movies are made by many people. Films like *Day for Night* (Truffaut) and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Reisz) help, but as the names in parenthesis indicate, it's common to attribute a film to one person even if, as Simon asserts, the auteur critics are fools. Most only know the big names and only a little about them: Edith Head made costumes; "Cubby" Broccoli produces James Bond films. The most intimate details in the lives of actors and actresses, once known only to readers of *Photoplay,* are common knowledge. We all know who is abusing whom and how in personal and intimate liaisons. Samuel Johnson recommended that people read biographies so that lessons from other lives could be learned. He would be appalled at the garbage being turned out by or about those associated with Hollywood. Readers of such dross learn nothing about human beings; instead, they are presented with inconsequential items about idealized or denigrated images.

A work that is efficacious in the sense of the Cham's dictum, a rarity in the midst of current Hollywoodiana, is *The Letters of Nunnally Johnson.* Nunnally Johnson was primarily a screenwriter. On occasion he worked as a director and/or producer. For example, he wrote (adapted, actually), directed and produced *The Three Faces of Eve.* Other films Johnson was involved with include *The Grapes of Wrath, How to Marry a Millionaire, The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit,* and those light-hearted films that fit James Stewart so well, *Mr. Hobbes Takes a Vacation, Take Her, She's Mine* and *Dear Brigitte.*

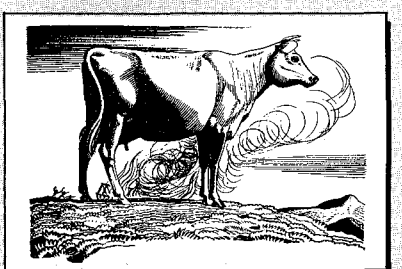
Johnson was born in Georgia in 1897 and, like many of his contemporaries who became writers, he established himself with pieces in *Smart Set* and the *Saturday Evening Post* before going west to that mecca for writers in the 20's, Hollywood. The connections with the east are seen in letters to people like James Thurber and Harold Ross. In Hollywood, Johnson could count Humphrey Bogart and Groucho Marx among his friends. Groupies and other gleaners of trivia can have a field day with Johnson's letters. What is laudable about the collection is that it provides a portrait of a man—a real man, not the creation of a PR flack—who had both wit and charm, things that are sorely lacking in Hollywood today, where sensibility exists only as something to be dulled with cocaine. Johnson is shown dealing with the problems and delights of family and friends, of children growing up, of friends thriving and dying. His Hollywood is terra firma, not Xanadu. Some have trouble teaching a class of college freshmen or with selling a package of insurance; Johnson had to struggle with obstinate performers and CinemaScope. Circumstances are different but the lessons are the same. This is not to say that Johnson's letters are eloquently crafted meditations: most are banter. To use a term from the partial vocabulary of film, they are cinema vérité. But not kiss-and-tell.

Nunnally Johnson had class. One of the best expressions of that is found in a letter he wrote to a man who was presumably collecting biographical information about William Faulkner. Wrote Johnson: "The legends about Faulkner in Hollywood are many and are fine for recounting across a table but I don't believe that they need to be transcribed for posterity." Much of today's Hollywood table talk belongs in the gutter, yet it's often the mainstay of best-seller lists. □

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *"Oyez, Oyez, Oyez—Moo"*

The *National Law Journal,* a prestigious publication for attorneys, has recently brought to its forum a debate raging in the halls of Congress and academe. It brings to mind the observation that although soon will mark the title of Mr. George Orwell's most famous work, his earlier piece, *Animal Farm,* is being realized today. The *Journal* reports that animal liberationists are working to amend the Animal Welfare Act. Their objective: to grant animals the "right to sue." McDonald's had better stop advertising the number of burgers it has sold; imagine the class-action suit that can be brought by all of those bereaved spouses mooing in meadows—and the quality of dialogue in the courtroom! □





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# Women, Work and Wimsey

**James Brabazon: *Dorothy L. Sayers;* Charles Scribner's Sons; New York.**

**by Keith Bower**

"I like the Gargoyle best," Dorothy L. Sayers wrote in a poem from her mid-teens. She continues, ". . . while the parson, full of pride/Spouts at his weary flock inside/The Gargoyle, from his lofty seat/Spouts at the people in the street." The figure was prophetic, for, though she could never have known it at the time, Dorothy L. Sayers would someday find her vocation imitating that architectural fixture. A gargoyle serves a number of purposes, from the mundane to the metaphysical. According to Russell Kirk, who makes a hobby of such *innominati,* their foremost purpose is plumbing: they throw rain off the roofs so as to protect the stone walls from being streaked. They represent the demons excluded from the sacred precincts of the church. Most pertinently, they remind complacent passersby that evil does exist, and that it is grotesque.

Dorothy L. Sayers will be principally remembered for her masterly detective novels, but for her, that was not her true work. Nor was applying her considerable poetic talents to the composition of Guinness advertisements for Benson's, an agency where she once toiled. When Dorothy L. Sayers wrote about work, there was no temptation for her to overrate it, as some of the Distributist writings tend to; she was a realist. Work, for some, is the sweat of the brow ignominiously converted into bullion. But when in the proper relationship with its agent ("the work proclaims the worth of the workman"), work is a transcendent thing.

Work is considered the central point of Dorothy L. Sayers's life in James Brabazon's biographical portrait. "Creativity" is a better term, sidestepping the morass of economic and sociological clichés with which our age tends to consider the subject. The demysticized perspective of work—in which it functions as part of the labor-capital-profit equation—was abominable to her. As Brabazon writes, Sayers "tarred capitalism and socialism with the same brush" on this account, and she was even willing to support the medieval Church in its hatred of usury, not just because of the biblical injunction but because in seeming to create something (interest) from nothing (money), man was mocking God's creativity.

Her best work of apologetics is an extended analogy entitled *The Mind of the Maker*. Throughout his biography, Brabazon points out how fittingly she assumed the tasks she took up, and this is a prime example. Dogmatic theology is a distant field for any layman, as difficult to popularize as campanology, which she rendered comprehensible to solve the Wimsey mystery of *The Nine Tailors*. In *The Mind of the Maker* Sayers used the creative process of art as a model and neatly transposed the three acts of intuition, energy and enthusiasm into the Triune Godhead, thus making it easy to see how three distinct faculties could emanate from one mind. Her analogy for Purgatory in her *Introductory Papers on Dante* is sweet and irrefutable. There is no evidence of her having sat in at the training sessions for F.J. Sheed's street-corner catechists, but her supreme talent was like theirs: the ability to communicate about realities ranging from the eternal to the evanescent.

It is a temptation of literary biographers to see their subject's life as an extension of one of their themes, and I cannot fault Brabazon for doing this; it is so compelling in this case. From *Gaudy Night* to her commissioned play for the Canterbury Festival, *Zeal to Thy House,* Sayers was struggling to come to grips with her life. She seemingly found an answer with her theory of "the right job." Stemming from her analogy of the Trinity, it's the idea that one's dignity as a human comes from superseding the financial considerations of work, and putting one's energy at the service of intuition and talent instead. C.S. Lewis once argued with her that this theory was simply an excuse for doing what she fancied, with the addition of God's blessing.

One of Sayers's most delightful essays on Christianity is "The Other Six Deadly Sins," wherein she does a marvelous analysis of the state of Gluttony, Avarice, Wrath, Covetousness, Pride, Sloth and Lust (which had stolen center stage) in wartime England. The penultimate offense, Sloth, is considered briefly and principally as that mortal sin which keeps people from thinking clearly. No one could accuse Dorothy L. Sayers of having transgressed in this regard; a mere glance at her bibliography thwarts such a suspicion. Yet, she characterizes "whiffling activity of body" as a dissemblance often fabricated by Sloth to snare souls. Obviously, if it is possible to wrap the facts of anyone's life around the kernel of one masterful vice, this would not be the energumen in Dorothy L. Sayers's soul. Wrath perhaps, but not as long as she was so consistently ill-tempered at the proper evils of her day: pomposity, stupidity, intolerant tolerance (liberalism). And these last two she rightly categorized as sins of Slothfulness, the first against intellect and the second against the spirit.

She was proud by nature, but Pride was no harnessing factor in her life. She fought the good fight against it. Sayers's faithful marriage and submission to the self-important and self-centered Oswald Atherton Fleming exonerates her. If it is possible truly to "die to self" outside of a contemplative order, she came very close to doing it. Yet she was lusty—in her youth at least. The consequences of her lapse into *luxuria* were an illegitimate son, a lifetime of grief and self-conscious doubt. A dreadful hypocrisy consumed

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her: at first she had kept son John Anthony's parentage a secret in order to save face among her colleagues at Benson's Agency. Then, with the unexpected popularity of *Zeal to Thy House,* she became a sought-after advocate of traditional orthodox Anglicanism. Like the perpetual foundling in an Edwardian comedy, the child's discovery by the London papers must have been a grievous fear indeed. She did not want to scandalize her Church with her own Maria Monk saga. The secret was never revealed, even her closest friends never suspected the truth until after her death. No, she paid for her lust with an unimaginable Purgatory on earth.

One of the main reasons for her out-of-wedlock child was her dogmatism about sexuality. She would not tolerate contraceptives. Her long, frustrating relationship with the writer John Cornous resulted in a stalemate over her insistence that any relationship, in or out of marriage, must honor her desire to be a mother and—eventually, at least—a wife. The father of the child was the most unlikely acquaintance possible for her: a semiliterate, fairly handsome, shiftless mechanic. He introduced her to dancing and passion. It was straight out of Tennessee Williams. The upshot of the catastrophe was that she never danced again, and she locked up her feelings permanently after "crying every night for three years." Her instincts had been right, but, as Brabazon comments, the shortage of men after World War I put many plain women like Dorothy in the same position.

The true sadness of Dorothy L. Sayers's life is revealed at the end of this tender biography. All of her years acting the gargoyle—aiding the Church from the outside, keeping its walls unstreaked by preserving the secret of her one folly—notwithstanding, she failed at the end. She was not defeated, but dispirited before the one cardinal sin she most constantly warred against: Sloth. In her introduction to Dante's *Purgatory* for the Penguin series, her definition of Cornice 4: Sloth or Accidie (Acedia) reads: "The failure to love any good object in its proper measure, and, especially, to love God actively with all one has and is." James Brabazon, her fellow worker in the theater, analyzes her life as the story of a woman struggling for purpose, finding it, reluctantly, in her role as one of the great modern apologists of the Church, only to learn that despite the intellect and scholarship she applied to explaining Christ's message, faith demanded something more than even her industriousness could provide.

She was churchwarden of St. Anne's House in Dean Street, Soho, and had devotedly worked to preserve a foothold of the Church in the rundown theater district she had loved so much as a young, starving Oxford graduate. Tirelessly, she had arranged lectures and discussions there with the greatest minds of the day—Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot. She had grown up in a vicarage and knew parish politics, but with all her savvy she couldn't keep the House alive. A new breed of "apologist" was on the scene; they wanted to "take people from where they were," to downplay the sort of concrete dogma that had once attracted Englishmen. There was a debate one night between Sayers and one of these brilliant Pelegians (as Dorothy might have called him), John Wren-Lewis. What she encountered was the next wave of the Latitudinarian movement. After having spent her life battling outright agnosticism, her defenses were down. It was Maundy Thursday, and, after the debate, which continued on into the vestry, Dorothy wrote Wren-Lewis a seventeen-page letter pouring out her soul, her doubts. She confessed that her strident concern for the "dogmatic pattern" was probably not enough, as we would now say, "to meet the needs of modern man." She conceded that the Creeds, upon which her Faith predominantly hinged, were left unrevised by future generations solely because of the historical accident of the Great Schism after the Council of Nicea. "It may be that our particular type of intellectual has had his day . . . I think it is very likely that the time has come that we ought to be superseded." The new foe to her faith was not just another truculent heresy, but a new generation. And, combined with her long-standing doubts about her own spirituality, and the deaths of her husband and Charles Williams, she was an easy mark for Acedia, the sin of the flagging spirit. She died with the third part of Dante's *Commedia* unfinished.

What would her life have been like if she had let the world know about her son, if she had accepted what she felt to be irredeemable disgrace? Harriet Vane, who is as close to an autobiographical character as Sayers gets in her fiction, sheds some light on this. After having her reputation forever tainted in an affair made public by the death of her lover, Harriet is acquitted of the murder by Lord Peter in *Strong Poison* and is portrayed in two more novels painfully weighing the decision to accept Wimsey's proposal of marriage. The scandal only serves to increase the sales of Harriet's novels, which Dorothy must have contemplated in her own case. But with the utter defeat of her pride, Harriet Vane begins to realize in *Gaudy Night* that a higher calling awaits her. Wimsey has glimpsed some Beatrician vision in her and through his persistence she realizes the importance of this "death to self" which has animated Lord Peter, a dapper little Whig with a protruberant nose, to a state of grace.

It was to be seven years before Dorothy L. Sayers discovered Charles Williams's *Figure of Beatrice* and with it the exhilaration of locating the path out of her own dark wood of Sloth, but in *Gaudy Night* Lord Peter, in completing a poem started by Harriet, furnishes the proof that she intuited it all along:

> Lay on thy whips, O Love, that we upright,
> Poised on the perilous point, in no lax bed,
> May sleep, as tension at the verberant core
> Of music sleeps; for, if thou spare to smite,
> Staggering, we stoop, stooping, fall dumb
> and dead,



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And, dying so, sleep our sweet sleep no more.

Dorothy L. Sayers once wrote that "The first life of any celebrity is nowadays accepted as an interim document," and James Brabazon's biography of her is certainly that. It was written to straighten the record before the "chaff-chewing" experts descended upon her. The biography is an honest, though obviously incomplete account, appearing, with the author's apologies, before Dorothy had wished one to be written. Her forebodings in this matter were primarily to spare her son and her Church, and to wait until "grief and passion have died down, until emotion can be remembered in tranquility." She needn't have worried about any damage to the Faith, and her son certainly may be proud of his ancestry. This personal and compelling account of her life and work would assuage all her doubts.

# Wishing Away Hobbes

**Stanley Hoffman: *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics;* Syracuse University Press; Syracuse, New York.**

**by Edward J. Lynch**

The study of ethics addresses questions about the ways in which people can live together well. It looks to the exemplars of human conduct and holds out these models as guides for lesser mortals. The conclusion of ethical study is the establishment of principles of right conduct, or, the definition of the good.

The study of international politics commonly addresses other aspects of human behavior. It draws its exemplars from the abyss of human attitudes and usually seeks suitable means of avoiding the worst deeds within the capacity of mankind. Because students of international relations haven't often accurately predicted the depths to which some of their fellow men will sink, their writing tends to involve *post-hoc* descriptions of the forms of conduct that we might like to avoid in the future. Those who write expositions of "the ethics of international politics" must, at some point, deal with the divergent tendencies inherent in their subject. As much as they might prefer to avoid the task, the authors of the best books attempting to synthesize the studies of ethics and international relations eventually realize that they must come to terms with that prophet of ultimate gloom, Thomas Hobbes. Better than any other thinker, Hobbes described in lurid detail the *summum malum,* that is, the greatest evil of human conduct. He depicted that condition as a state of nature, a war of each against all, where human life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

Stanley Hoffman has served as a professor of international relations for many years, and he acknowledges the need to confront Hobbes as he commences this series of lectures on the ethics of the international order. Early on, Hoffman assures his reader, "Not at all times are states in a situation of war of all against all," and, "Nor is survival the only goal of states." Having said as much, the author dismisses the sage of Malmesbury and proceeds to preach his own standards of order in the current world.

Professors commonly employ the alibi that they are theorizing as an excuse to abandon the leavening of responsibility that is the focus of serious study. Hoffman repeatedly asserts that he is a "realist" and therefore recognizes the limits of day-to-day politics, constituencies and ideologies that prevent the achievement of his "ideal" world. Nevertheless, he has labeled his discourse a quest for the possibilities of ethical international politics. As a result, his vision of an ethical world permeates the text.

Hoffman's vision begins with the assertion, "The purpose of moral action in international affairs ought to be to diminish the strain of the antinomies that weigh on the statesman and on the citizen.... A morality of self-restraint entails simply taking into account the existence of the moral claims of others." Stated in this fashion, one suspects that what follows will include some guidelines about what constitutes a valid moral claim, that is, a discussion of the ends of politics. But instead of a philosophic discussion of the responsibilities of real politics, the text soon degenerates into vacuous postulating. The author eschews any discussion of the ends toward which moral politics ought to be directed. Hoffman informs his reader that "no philosophy of history provides us once and for all with a tool kit or a destination," and he adds, "At present there are incompatible codes of legitimacy.... The only common code ... is national egoism." In effect, his very premises deny the possibility of philosophy, of a reasoned discussion by which one can decide which code of legitimacy is more valid than others, since it provides higher standards for human conduct and a serious purpose for human existence within an international order. Instead, Hoffman offers empty slogans. We are told that the Israelis should be guaranteed claims to a state in the Middle East, while we should concede the legitimate claims of the Arabs who surround them. He passes over the matter of reconciling these competing claims, i.e. the fact that many of these Arabs believe that their legitimate rights cannot be honored as long as Israel exists. He also assures his reader that hard-and-fast principles are very difficult because the conditions of international politics are so frequently ambiguous. His example of ambiguity is the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the very event that even Jimmy Carter found a clarifying influence on his understanding of the character of Soviet conduct.

A serious ethical study provides some groundwork to guide one toward the

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description of the ideal that has been chosen. Hoffman is content to inform his reader only that his is a liberal vision, the character of which is to be inferred from the vision of a good world that he subsequently describes. He simply assumes that the reader shares this vision, for he makes no effort to convince those who might hold another that the good viewed through his lenses is superior to the ideals offered by others.

One suspects that Hoffman would have a great deal of difficulty attempting to convince others of his vision of the good because he appears incapable of the serious discussion of ideas. He is quick to dismiss any assertions of opposing parties in international disputes as "ideology." His major avoidance of the serious discussion of conflicting ideas is his embrace, early in the text, of Max Weber's notion of an "ethics of responsibility," as opposed to an "ethics of ultimate ends." A realist would acknowledge that an "ethics of responsibility" is possible only if the ultimate goals have already been chosen. One can have a notion of "responsible" (that is, right) conduct only after one has decided what the proper standard of human conduct should be in the given situation. Until these standards have been chosen, or unless one assumes universal agreement to the most vaguely asserted "ideals," one is still lacking an idea of the substance under consideration. The true realist realizes that discussion under such conditions is simply wasted air.

Although a caricature of Hobbes was dismissed early in the text, Hobbes's real problem resurfaces throughout the book. As a founder of modern liberalism, Hobbes knew that the state of nature was not merely a fiction that could be wished away because people do not act consistently in a vicious manner. His influence endures because he expressed, more eloquently than anyone before or since, that, however ardently politicians aspire to establish a good society, their actions will always be governed in a critical sense by those who seek to reduce human conduct to the beastly. A true ethics of responsibility would begin by recognizing the vicious character of certain "ideals" and conceding the responsibility of politicians to prevent their society from the pursuit of such vicious ends. For Hobbes, the worst fate that could befall man was the violent death that was a constant threat in the state of nature. The responsibility to protect the mere existence of life thus became the primary task of the Leviathan. Given Hoffman's recurrent assertions of the importance of preventing violence and pursuing peaceful change, one can only conclude that he does not understand the extent to which he remains under Hobbes's influence.

The leaders of the Soviet Union reject the Hobbesian view, believing that they have a historical responsibility to establish a socialist international order consistent with the principles of dialectical materialism. For them, life has value only as long as it promotes this "ideal." The role of the gulag in the Soviet Union and the sequence of events demonstrating the desire of the Soviets to impose a socialist order on other societies around the globe indicate the seriousness with which they pursue their vision. The American founders also rejected the Hobbesian view. Although they recognized that the preservation of life is a precondition to any other achievements in this world, the signers of the Declaration of Indepencence would have sacrificed their lives, fortunes and sacred honor to preserve their status as a free people. For them, and for the system of government that they instituted, one cannot achieve happiness as a slave.

By rejecting an "ethic of ultimate ends" and eschewing the responsibility to decide whether either of these alternative ethical visions is preferable, Hoffman maintains his links with the relativism that now reigns in the American academy. His inability to choose, on principled grounds, between the vision of the American founders and the vision of the Soviet leaders reflects the paralysis resulting from that relativism. As an intellectual leader among current teachers of international politics, Hoffman is an architect of the strategy of capitulation that is a logical result of this intellectual paralysis. That paralysis is unlikely to be cured until our intellectual elite develops a capacity to discuss differences between disparate sets of ideas in a more serious manner. If nothing else, Hobbes's influence will outlast Hoffman's because he painted a more accurate picture of the results of such intellectual evasions. □

## In the Mail

***Science and the Quest for Meaning*** **by Donald M. MacKay; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan.** MacKay argues that there is little reason for a dichotomy between science and faith in two lively lectures.

***Christianity & Civilization*** **edited by James B. Jordan; Geneva Divinity School; Tyler, Texas.** This collection of essays is subtitled "The Failure of the American Baptist Culture," a topic that is thoroughly examined.

**"The Peace Movement and the Soviet Union" by Vladimir Bukovsky; The Orwell Press; New York.** Bukovsky shows how Lenin's statement, "As an ultimate objective peace simply means Communist world control," is being manifested in the world.

***Tax-Based Incomes Policies: A Cure for Inflation?*** **by Jack Carr, William Scarth and Robert Schuettinger; the Fraser Institute; Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.** An insightful analysis of the causes and cures of inflation written in nontechnical language.

***Four American Indian Literary Masters*** **by Alan R. Velie; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman, Oklahoma.** An introduction to four outstanding contemporary Indian writers—N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor.



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# Profound Dislikes & Spiritual Heroism

**Vladimir Nabokov: *Lectures on Russian Literature;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.**

**Ronald Hingley: *Nightingale Fever: Russian Poets in Revolution;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.**

by Charles A. Moser

Vladimir Nabokov, exiled from his homeland for art's sake, is the only man ever to have established a reputation as a major writer of fiction both in English and in Russian. He was also a scholar with wide interests and strong opinions who did much to bring the riches of Russian literature within the consciousness of the uninitiated American reader.

The pieces gathered in his *Lectures on Russian Literature* consist primarily of notes for lecture classes that he gave as an academic—first at Wellesley, then at Cornell—after he arrived in the United States in 1940 and before his literary success enabled him to cease teaching in this format in 1958. During that period, native-born American specialists in Russian literature were few and far between, and their published work was just as sparse. Consequently Nabokov was obliged to design his presentations—on Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky—for an audience that knew little about his subjects. If that is understandable, it is more surprising that he evidently did not expect his classes to have read the major works of the writers he was covering, for otherwise it is difficult to comprehend why he should have allotted such large portions of his remarks to undiluted quotation. This does not mean that nothing of benefit can be gleaned from Nabokov's book, compiled and edited by Fredson Bowers, but it does mean that Nabokov's more enlightening nuggets are buried in what is largely extraneous material.

Nabokov believed that a literary scholar could make a great contribution to an untutored reader's understanding of a work by investigating a text thoroughly and explicating obvious and concealed references within it, then providing that information in notes. He set a magnificent example when he produced one of the finest English editions of a single Russian work, a translation of Alexander Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin,* published in 1964 in four volumes, two of which contain notes incorporating the fruits of his wide interests and strong opinions. He provided similar instruction, though on a smaller scale, for Mihail Lermontov in his translation of *A Hero of Our Time* (1958), and for the epic *Song of Igor's Campaign* (1960), a work supposedly dating from the 12th century. And the most valuable portions of these *Lectures* follow the same tradition. For example, he carefully traced the travels of the youthful heroes of Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons.* For Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* he analyzed the chronology of the novel, described in fond detail the layout of the railway car in which Anna travels from Moscow to St. Petersburg and simply composed notes for segments of the novel. Indeed, Nabokov loved the realia of fiction; he even asserted that the fictional creations of Tolstoy enjoy a more genuine reality in our minds today than does an actual diplomat of the period who published memoirs which aid us in establishing the novel's early chronology. And Nabokov was right.

But he did not think the critic's task was exhausted by the compilation of notes, no matter how intelligent. He was himself a writer-critic who dealt with the works of literary giants (at one point he let slip a fairly obvious hint that he considered himself among them) and assessed them from the artistic point of view. He was deeply rooted in the literary thought of the turn of this century, when writers made of art a surrogate religion: he spoke of the Moscow Art Theater, the cradle of Chekhov's plays, as a "temple of careful and genuine art." At the center of Nabokov's artistic credo seems to have been a belief in "harmony." Among his favorite authors were Pushkin and Chekhov, whom he declared "the purest writers that Russia has produced in the sense of the complete harmony that their writings convey." He sounded the same note in his evaluation of *Anna Karenina* and its "moral point," namely that "love cannot be exclusively carnal because then it is egotistic, and being egotistic it destroys instead of creating." The positive example of this formulation in the novel is the love between Levin and Kitty, "balanced and harmonious in the pure atmosphere of responsibility, tenderness, truth, and family joys," as Nabokov phrased it.

One great writer of the 19th century whom Nabokov thoroughly detested was Dostoyevsky, and we may wonder why this should have been so. One source of this hostility was probably the Christian spirit which so permeated Dostoyevsky's work. Nabokov referred to that spirit as "neurotic Christianism" at one point, and Dostoyevsky's religious approach was profoundly foreign to Nabokov. The religious dimension is almost absent in Nabokov's favorites, Pushkin and Chekhov; it is reduced to an ethical code in Tolstoy; and the religious vision in Gogol's fiction was of a sort which Nabokov could ignore for the sake of his verbal brilliance. He could not do the same for Dostoyevsky. But a more important source of Nabokov's dislike may have been Dostoyevsky's esthetic outlook. Wrote Nabokov:

> I approach literature from the only point of view that literature interests me—namely the point of view of enduring art and individual genius. From this point of view Dostoevski is

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not a great writer, but a rather mediocre one—with flashes of excellent humor, but, alas, with wastelands of literary platitudes in between.

A bit later in his discussion (and he was always acutely aware that his assessment of Dostoyevsky was not widely shared), Nabokov came closer to formulating his genuine objection. Dostoyevsky's world, he complained, "is created too hastily without any sense of that harmony and economy which the most irrational masterpiece is bound to comply with (in order to be a masterpiece)." And in fact Dostoyevsky's world is not at all "harmonious." One critic has called his work "the novel of discord"; chaos and disorder always seethe below the surface, and it is difficult for the reader to arrive at the "truth" of his world. Dostoyevsky's universe is the artistic progeny of the uncertainty principle in physics, a world in which people are permanently plagued by doubt, where they find no final answers. Harmony implies a state of rest, the most appropriate arrangement of reality possible under given conditions, an arrangement we readily recognize as the best feasible one.

In 1947 Diana Trilling reviewed Nabokov's novel *Bend Sinister,* "about a professor of philosophy in an unnamed country who is destroyed by the tyrannical government that has come to power." She disliked Nabokov almost as much as Nabokov detested Dostoyevsky, primarily because he wrote "in a claustrophobic style in which the reader's mind is allowed to do no work of its own and which leads us by meaningless associations into blind alleys where it traps us in boredom." Mrs. Trilling may have caught an important facet of Nabokov's mindset. Although he was a convinced anticommunist all his life, his outlook still shared with the totalitarian viewpoint a predilection for artistic harmony and moral certainty. It may be no accident that many of the writers he liked are also those in greatest favor in the Soviet Union today, and the ones he disliked tend to be out of favor in that same country (Gorky —whom Nabokov disliked—is an exception to this generalization, but here purely political considerations are paramount). Like the radical 19th-century Russian critics, Nabokov sought a rational ordering of reality as the ideal, and Dostoyevsky argued powerfully against

the very possibility of any such ordering. Consequently Nabokov found it necessary to denigrate Dostoyevsky as a composer of platitudes. He was not.

The ineluctable conflict between the poetic mind and the totalitarian state is a recurring theme in *Nightingale Fever,* by Ronald Hingley of St. Antony's College, Oxford, a prolific literary historian and translator (he edited and translated the nine-volume *Oxford Chekhov*). This book is a poetic and biographical study of Boris Pasternak, Marina Tsvetaeva, Anna Akhmatova and Osip Mandelstam, four of the finest poets in world literature of this century (I consider a few poems appended to *Dr. Zhivago* the most powerful religious poetry of this century, and it was written by a Jew converted to Christianity living in an officially atheistic state where all religious belief is cruelly persecuted). All four were born between 1889 and 1892 and belonged to that remarkable poetic generation which reached maturity about the time of World War I and the October Revolution. Of these four, Pasternak came closest—in the 1930's—to placing his poetic gift at the service of Stalinist tyranny. He drew back from that abyss just in time. But he was always much better off materially than any of the other three until the very end of his life, when he incurred the wrath of the authorities by publishing *Dr. Zhivago* abroad.

All four poets faced a cruel moral dilemma in deciding how to respond personally to the regime's artistic demands. Mandelstam brought the fury of the authorities upon himself with an unpublished poem mocking Stalin the dictator. In 1936, sick and in exile, Mandelstam tried to betray his own nature by composing an ode designed to glorify that same dictator, in the hope that it would win him release from an intolerable situation. But he simply was incapable of writing poetry based on lies. Mandelstam could compel himself no further in that direction than ambiguity, and he concluded the ode with lines very unlike those characteristic of tributes to the Leader of the Peoples:

> Bulges of human heads recede into the distance.
> Mine dwindles too, and soon I'll disappear from notice.
>
> Yet in my gentle books, in little children's laughter,
> Shall I be resurrected and proclaim the sunshine.

Mandelstam was arrested by the secret police in 1938 and apparently died in December of that year in Vladivostok. No one has any idea where his grave is located.

Marina Tsvetaeva, the poetess of lost causes in love and politics—she was so foolhardy as to write poetic tributes to the anticommunist forces at a time when they had clearly lost the battle for Russia's soul—chose the path of impoverished European exile, but could not follow it to the end. In 1939 she returned to Moscow but found conditions there so impossible that she took her own life in August of 1941.

Like Pasternak, Akhmatova con-



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sciously rejected the thought of exile from her native land, even though her ex-husband, another excellent poet, was executed as a counterrevolutionary in 1921, her son was arrested during the great purges of the 1930's and she herself was the target of an intense campaign of political vilification—because of her religious and personal verse—at the end of World War II. But she published only a handful of subservient poems, and then only at the height of postwar Stalinism. Otherwise she maintained her poetic integrity. In 1965, just before her death, she was permitted to visit Oxford to receive an honorary degree.

Despite a few lapses under intense pressure—for which it is difficult for us who have never known such pressures to condemn them—all four poets defended the primacy of the independent poetic spirit in the face of the demands of the all-encompassing totalitarian state. They would not assent to the imposed, artificial harmony of totalitarianism, both out of a sense of personal integrity and out of a dedication to religious values (except in Tsvetaeva's case). Hingley gives us a sympathetic account of all four lives—arranged chronologically and sometimes a little mechanically—with some emphasis on their personal interrelationships. One might cavil at certain details—Hingley skips very rapidly over the final decades of Pasternak's and Akhmatova's careers after 1941, by which time Mandelstam and Tsvetaeva had passed from the scene, and he has an irritating way of translating poetry into English with the articles omitted ("In follow-up to own words/He hewed own line, made jacket bulge")—but the book commemorates not only four superb poets, but also four heroes of the human spirit who will remain with us when their tormentors have long been covered by impenetrable oblivion. □

# We, the Natives

**Joel Garreau: *The Nine Nations of North America;* Houghton Mifflin Co.; Boston.**

**Jonathan Raban: *Old Glory: An American Voyage;* Simon & Schuster; New York.**

**by John Shelton Reed**

"There is no frigate like a book"—Miss Dickinson wrote, in lines that used to send seventh-grade boys into paroxysms of suppressed giggles—"to take us lands away." When I confess that I'd rather read even a bad travel book than most best-selling novels these days, I don't know whether that reflects poorly on me or on the novels, but there's no question that with the price of travel what it is, travel books are a comparative bargain, even at fifteen dollars and up.

Here's a test. Consider two books: (1) an account of a small-boat trip down the Mississippi by an Englishman who has been a Mark Twain enthusiast since childhood and recently wrote a fine travel book about the Middle East; (2) an op-ed piece from the *Washington Post* on regional diversity in the U.S., expanded to 427 pages by its author, who flew around the country for a year on an expense account, popping in here and there to talk to folks. Which is the better book?

You're wrong (and I was, too). *Old Glory* is a disappointing exercise in self-indulgence, and *The Nine Nations of North America* is good, solid reporting, with a provocative thesis that's well worth thinking about.

One of the delights of travel books comes from revisiting exotic places where one has actually been before. Good books can evoke familiar smells and tastes as well as scenery; bad ones give the reader the more subtle pleasure of one-upping the author. Almost as satisfying, to me at least, are books about places I haven't been—perhaps especially when they persuade me that I'm not missing anything. Paul Theroux's *Old Patagonian Express,* for instance, has guaranteed that I will never go out of my way to visit Latin America, and Eric Newby seems to specialize in this genre: *The Big Red Train* will convince any sensible reader that Siberia is best left unvisited, and *Slowly Down the Ganges* has to be the most excruciatingly tedious travel book ever written. Books like that—which not only make the reader feel he's "been there," but cure him of any desire to go again—are a blessing to those of us with world-class wanderlust and bush-league budgets.

My fondness for travel books is in direct proportion to the extent to which I can identify with the author. When I can't put myself in his place (as I can't, for instance—despite trying very hard—with T.E. Lawrence), I may read his book with pleasure, but I read it for information, not for vicarious experience. This is almost always the case with a book written by a native: I'll give him a respectful hearing, figuring he knows more about it than I ever will (whether he chooses to tell me or not), but I don't come away with the feeling that I've visited the place. On the other hand, when Theroux traverses the Orient in *The Great Railway Bazaar,* when V.S. Naipaul goes *Among the Believers* of the non-Arab Islamic world or his brother Shiva does an Evelyn Waugh number on Guyana and California in *Journey to Nowhere,* I can imagine having the same experiences. The author and I are amused, puzzled, irritated, pleased by the same things; we are both outsiders, just passing through, and nothing *matters* as much as it would to a native.

I liked Jonathan Raban's *Arabia* very much. It wasn't the greatest travel book since the *Odyssey,* as some of the reviews implied, but it was good journeyman work: evocative description, amusing

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anecdotes, interesting conversations, occasionally a sharp observation. I looked forward to *Old Glory*. I should have known better.

A different sort of problem comes up when outsiders (Raban, as I said, is English) write books about *our* society. Here we are the natives. When the author is amused, puzzled, irritated, or pleased, we're the reason. And here the presumption of knowledge is with the reader, who (in my case, at least) reads these accounts with some anxiety: Does he understand? Did he get it right?

> ". . . [Raban] has given us a fresh portrait of ourselves."
>
> —*Newsweek*

Sometimes, of course, even a bad book—one that gets many things wrong—can be interesting because of how it gets them wrong. *Separate Country*, an otherwise unremarkable book by an Englishman named Paul Binding, earned a place in my heart and on my bookshelf for one passage alone. Binding arrived in Atlanta by train, in early morning, and set out to walk downtown from the station (and who but a foreigner would *walk?*):

> I had walked for some time down a pleasant but uninteresting suburban road before, standing at the crest of a downward-sloping avenue, I saw—as if placed there for my benefit only instants before—downtown Atlanta. I think there can be no urban landscape in the world more dramatic than Atlanta seen from a short distance. It is a dense, sudden, strange cluster of skyscrapers, diverse in shape and height but all at a casual glance seemingly made of polished glass. . . . [T]he rising sun shone through that abrupt and soaring forest of buildings and made the most extraordinary of them all—the round, gigantic, dominating Peachtree Hotel—a burning column of green and orange.

Well, like most conservative Southerners, when I look at Atlanta *I* see what two hundred thousand Confederate soldiers died to prevent—but I'll never see it again without realizing that there is one Englishman out there who thinks it looks like the Emerald City of Oz.

My pleasure in these odd new angles, however, is usually offset by irritation that someone can presume to write about *us* on the basis of a quick and superficial tour. Of course, it's gratifying, in a way, to be thought interesting enough to be the subject of a book, and Southerners probably have this experience more often than other Americans. With the possible exception of Southern California, the South is the part of America that New Yorkers and other foreigners seem to find most exotic. Maybe a great travel book could be written about Nebraska (after all, Newby wrote about Siberia), but I have yet to hear of one. Nebraska for the Nebraskans seems to be the general view. Sometimes, though, a Southerner can envy Nebraskans their normality, their boringness, or whatever it is that keeps visiting firemen away. One can get tired of reading about his homeplace and wondering where the author got *that* idea.

Southerners and Midwesterners alike will often find themselves responding that way to *Old Glory*, although sometimes, unfortunately, it's perfectly evident where Raban got his ideas: they're about what you would expect from the Smith College professor that he once was. At one point he seems to sympathize, almost, with an Iowa businessman who protests that Easterners are always treating Iowans as yokels, but usually he can't resist putting down Midwesterners himself. (I can't either, but I'm not writing a travel book.) One doesn't expect Raban to like everything, but one wishes his likes and dislikes weren't so predictable.

As he told the Iowan, this book is not the inside story on America, but rather the inside story on Raban (which gives an unexpected and almost certainly unintended twist to the title)—and perhaps that's the trouble. Raban's opinions and personal problems lead him into activities he cares about, but when he expects his readers to care, he expects too much. One particularly wearisome episode sees our narrator laying over for some weeks in Memphis to fight for truth, justice and the American way in the context of a mayoral election. He may have been, as he believes, on the side of the angels, but what is an English travel writer doing on any side at all? He didn't meddle in Yemen's politics when he was writing *Arabia*—or if he did, he didn't insist on telling us about it. The self-indulgence that dictated Raban's itinerary shows up again and again, and long before the journey was over I'd concluded that however pleasant it was to visit the Middle East with him, Raban is not the sort of chap I'd choose for company on a boat ride from Minneapolis to New Orleans. To make matters worse, he has a tendency to pick up unpleasant companions and not to drop them fast enough. One woman in St. Louis, in particular, gets tiresome some dozen pages before Raban wearies of her.

Maybe I'm too hard on the boy. Maybe I'm jealous because nobody paid me to take that trip and write about it. Let's be fair. There are the makings of a good two-hundred-page book scattered through this 400-pager. Raban is not the book's real hero: that is Old Man River, who does indeed just keep rolling along. There are some marvelous passages about the river—as good as anything Raban's beloved Twain ever wrote. Those readers who've seen the Mississippi only from the bridges and hotel windows will never see it the same way again. And Raban didn't miss *all* of the interesting people en route. My favorites, inevitably, are Southerners—a good ole boy from Tiptonville, Kentucky; a Negro undertaker and a thoroughly assimilated Lebanese merchant in Vicksburg; an indomitable formerly *grande dame* in a Natchez old-folks'



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home; an Irish-Choctaw-Scotch-Mexican riverboat captain. *Old Glory* is at its best when Raban just lets some of these people talk. Here is a group of card-players at Erjie's Bar and Cafe in Lockport, Louisiana. Raban asked about a place to stay:

> 'Hey,' called a fat man from his bar stool. 'You want a place, I can show you a place. Out there in the bayous. . . .' He swiveled around. 'Know what's there? A cave. A cave full of froomids. You know what a froomid is?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'He's shooting his mouth off. Keep quiet, Louis.'
>
> 'Froomids is . . . paradise. They is . . . men and women all mixed up together. [Some anatomical description follows.] That's froomids. They'll eat you alive. But with the froomids, it's like heaven, know what I mean?'
>
> 'Hermaphrodites,' I said.
>
> 'Froomids!' he said. 'Listen to what I'm saying to you!'
>
> 'Louis Beauregard,' said the man next to me, 'after you come here, this place done go to the dogs.'
>
> Louis Beauregard glittered contentedly. 'Well . . . all *you* got to do is: barbecue them dogs.'

Raban can listen, and if he'd stuck to describing the river and playing straight man to Cajuns, I'd be more enthusiastic about it.

You'd think that trying to prove an explicit thesis would pretty much sour a travel book, but in *The Nine Nations of North America* Joel Garreau doesn't let it. He states the thesis forthrightly on page one:

> Consider . . . the way North America really works. It is Nine Nations. Each has its capital and its distinctive web of power and influence. A few are allies, but many are adversaries. Several have readily acknowledged national poets, and many have characteristic dialects and mannerisms. Some are close to being raw frontiers; others have four centuries of history. Each has a peculiar economy; each commands a certain emotional allegiance from its citizens. . . . Each nation has its own list of desires. . . . Most important, each nation has a distinct prism through which it views the world.

Right or wrong, Garreau's framework serves him well. He means to say some important things about what is happening to America, but he believes that to put the question that way is misleading: different things are happening to different parts of America. If you look at *Ecotopia*—well, maybe Charles Reich was right. But *The Foundry* isn't being greened, and its problems are completely different from those of *Dixie,* which differs in turn from the dry but resource-rich *Empty Quarter* (named after the original, in Saudi Arabia). The "United States" (after reading Garreau, you want to put it in quotes) is being nibbled away at from the South, and it just doesn't make sense to talk about Miami in isolation from *The Islands,* which it serves as unofficial capital, or to treat El Paso apart from the rest of *MexAmerica.* But that's not Minnesota's problem, and anyway *The Breadbasket,* like *New England,* is encroaching on the territory of "Canada"—an even worse idea than the United States, as many natives of *Quebec* have been saying for some time. All this may sound rather too schematic, but there is obviously a grain of truth here, if not a whole carload. The incredible diversity of our continent has never been in doubt in some quarters, but in others (Washington, for instance, where Garreau works) it can't be emphasized too often.

In general, Garreau seeks out and approves of things that make his "nations" different from one another and scowls at those that make them similar. This is not just a matter of liking things that support his thesis. Unlike Jonathan Raban, who was ready enough to acknowledge that the America he boated through was different from the one for which he was apparently writing, but usually saw those differences as either quaint or appalling, Garreau clearly tends to delight in diversity per se. (So do I. The appropriate

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *Spare the Soap, Save the Child*

The *New York Times* has breathlessly brought to light the findings of Chaytor D. Mason, associate professor of human factors-psychology at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, to the frustrated preschool set. Reports Prof. Mason:

> In some situations, say, when the child is fixing his wagon and hits his thumb, he could either hammer the wagon to pieces or swear to release the tension. Swearing can restore physical calm to the body and give a feeling of control.

Had we been granted this revelation in

the 60's, we would, of course, have looked at the, say, infantile Mario Savio and his associates in a quite different way. They obviously weren't radical, revolutionary or even foul-mouthed. Just tense. □



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scriptural metaphor, we rednecks might say, is the Coat of Many Colors, not the Tower of Babel, but I confess—and Garreau might, too—that this judgment is as much aesthetic as political.)

The persona that emerges from Garreau's book is that of a curious, perceptive and witty reporter—a good companion for the kind of voyage the book offers, one with which the reader can identify. Having brandished his conceptual axe at the outset, Garreau grinds it only inconspicuously through the next nine chapters, each a visit to one of the "nations." For the most part, he appears to do simply what I wish Raban had done: travel around, seek out telling scenes and interesting people, watch and listen and report. This is artful, of course, but we've been warned. Garreau's opinions are evident, to be sure, but they are seldom intrusive and not always predictable. He has some fun with the "Ecotopians" of the Northwest, for instance, whose treasured "quality of life" presupposes an economy stoked by defense contracts, and I will always be in his debt for the expression *clone bar,* to refer to those "watering holes" with hanging ferns, natural wood, exposed brick and lots of mirrors.

Garreau intended something more than an updated (and superior) version of *Inside U.S.A.*, though, and *The Nine Nations of North America* at least raises the interesting question of whether (and if so, why) the United States is immune to the centrifugal tendencies lately evident in almost every other industrialized state. Garreau thinks we're not, and you could draw the same conclusion from reading Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave,* a work of pop sociology that has good news and bad news for nearly everybody, most specifically including conservatives. Jonathan Raban caught a glimpse of the same vision by watching television commercials in an Iowa motel:

> The families who populated this bland fiction of American middle-class life looked and sounded like a pack of fancy weirdos. They were skinny fast-talkers, jabbering about laxatives and cake mixes and automobiles. They were as foreign to the America that I was living in as I was myself. . . . I thought how tamely we had all succumbed to the theory that television automatically draws the world together. Surely it had just as strong a tendency to pull the world apart. It was television that fueled [the] hatred of the 'beautiful people,' the Washington outlaws, Angelenos and New Yorkers. . . . [One] switched on his set in order to be reminded of their beastliness.

Time will tell, of course, whether these prophecies of decentralization (my less-Calhounian friends might say disintegration) will be fulfilled. Meanwhile, we can enjoy *The Nine Nations of North America* as a good *travel book,* combining most of the various pleasures I mentioned above. There are parts of North America (I'll leave them unnamed) where I no longer want to go; other parts I enjoyed visiting, or revisiting, and seeing through Garreau's eyes. I think he even gets the South pretty much right: his boundary-drawing exercise is right on the money, his resolution of the problem of what to do with Miami is a great relief, and his account of how Dixie is shaping up these days is right up there with Fred Powledge's *Journeys Through the South* —and Powledge is a native. A good traveler's account of journeys around North America is no small achievement, even if it was not Garreau's principal intention. I don't shudder to think of foreigners reading *Nine Nations*—unlike *Old Glory.* But I notice that even Garreau doesn't have much to say about Nebraska. □

# His Vietnam Problem—and Ours

**Norman Podhoretz: *Why We Were in Vietnam;* Simon & Schuster; New York.**

**by Leslie Lenkowsky**

Although all wars are, to some extent, fought on two fronts, the Vietnam War was surely exceptional in the degree to which action on the home front was as crucial as that on the battlefield. This is not to disparage the contributions of those who served and died in Southeast Asia, but rather to assert that Vietnam was as much a war of ideas and politics as of bombs and bullets. Our enemies understood that and developed an exquisite ability to wage ideological as well as conventional combat. Moreover, though American strategy and tactics may have been misguided, our defeat was not, in the end, a military one. If the aim of all warfare is to destroy the opposing nation's willingness to resist, the extraordinary aspect of the Vietnam conflict is how little of this was accomplished by our enemy and how much was due to our own growing doubts about the course we were pursuing.

Of the many books that have been written about this war, Norman Podhoretz's *Why We Were in Vietnam* is the first to examine it as a battle of ideas. His is not primarily an account of strategic miscalculations, cultural misunderstandings or political miscreance. Nor is it an original work of diplomatic or military history, though it sheds light on both. Instead, Podhoretz approaches the Vietnam War as a topic for exegesis. The result is a *tour de force* that not only reminds us of why the United States went into Vietnam, but also illuminates the crucial problem that continues to haunt American foreign policy.

As Podhoretz tells it, the story of the Vietnam War is the story of a generation —essentially his generation—that lost its

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nerve. Contrary to the popular impression, those who came of age during the 1940's and 1950's were not narrow-minded strivers, interested only in jobs, homes and automobiles. Rather, this was a generation that could be quite responsive to patriotic ideals—especially the call to contain, with force if necessary, the advance of totalitarianism. With World War II barely over, it again shouldered arms in Korea. It created and took seriously a formidable array of mutual-assistance treaties and international organizations, even the United Nations. In his inaugural address, President Kennedy did not simply call upon his fellow Americans to "bear any burden, meet any hardship . . . to assure the survival and the success of liberty"; he asserted this as a reality of which all potential aggressors should be aware. Among this generation, appeasement was little in evidence, for it was the generation upon which Munich had left a strong and seemingly indelible stamp.

And it was to prevent another Munich that, in Podhoretz's view, led the United States to intervene in "a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing" (as Chamberlain had characterized the Czechoslovakian crisis). In retrospect, he concedes that we did it badly. Our military strategy and the political tactics necessary to sustain American support for a bloody and costly war were poorly devised. Yet, what should no longer be disputed is whether our cause was just. The United States, Podhoretz writes, fought in Vietnam not because it was in our national interest to do so (as is usually claimed), but out of a sense of duty to prevent the spread of communism. The worthiness of that goal is clearly revealed in the aftermath of the American defeat: boatloads of refugees, brutality and repression for those who remained, bolder and more successful communist adventurism around the globe. Imprudent and unsuccessful as it may have been, the war in Vietnam was nonetheless motivated by a high and honorable ideal.

This would hardly be worth saying, let alone devoting a book to, were it not the case that only a tiny minority of Podhoretz's generation believes it. Having gone into Vietnam with the lesson of Munich still fresh, American leaders became convinced that applying it was not only impractical and impolitic but immoral as well. Indeed, as Podhoretz shows, the triumph of the idea that the United States was not fighting for liberty but against it—that America was the aggressor and not the protector, that we were wrong and our enemies, if not right (as some argued), were at least no worse than we were—ultimately led to our downfall. Thus, the end of our involvement in Southeast Asia had an additional result: the United States lost not only a war in Vietnam but also its faith in the wisdom of trying to contain communism.

To Podhoretz, who believes that containment should still be the foundation of American foreign policy, the born-again agnosticism of the Munich generation is a serious problem. If those who had understood the need to draw the line against totalitarianism no longer did, who would? To restore that belief is the purpose of Podhoretz's effort. Despite his own continued skepticism that winning in Vietnam was within our capabilities, he leaves no doubt that we were right to try. Although *Why We Were in Vietnam* will not convince the more outspoken critics of the war (as several scathing reviews have shown), it should do much to dispel the lingering confusion and sense of guilt that have all but paralyzed American foreign policy for the last decade.

Yet, because of a second legacy of Vietnam, even this small but important contribution may not be enough. The war not only shook the confidence of the Munich generation, but it also shaped the outlook of the generation that came of age during the 1960's and early 1970's, the one beginning to come to power. "Especially for younger people who had no personal memory of the Second World War," claims Podhoretz, "Vietnam did not so much to reverse the legacy of Munich as it succeeded the legacy of Auschwitz." The United States was not simply mistaken in trying to halt communist expansion; it was seen as the source of what was wrong in the world in the first place. Such a view had an inevitable corollary: "Millions of young people growing to maturity during the war developed attitudes of such hostility towards their own country and the civilization embodied by its institutions that their willingness to defend it against external enemies in the future was left hanging in doubt." For Podhoretz's generation, the problem is one of recapturing faith; for the Vietnam generation, it is a matter of discovering it.

"Mr. Podhoretz's history is as muddled as his analysis."
—Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
*Harper's*

"This simplified view of history . . ."
—*New York Times Book Review*

Perhaps nowhere is this difference better illustrated than in the current debate over United States policy in Central America. To former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, an unrepentant member of the Munich generation, communism is again on the march, this time affecting vital interests in our own hemisphere. Even more than in Vietnam, a policy of containment, by military means if necessary, is warranted. This is definitely not the position of two of the youngest members of the Senate, 41-year-old Paul E. Tsongas and 37-year-old Christopher J. Dodd. The Reagan Administration's policy-makers, Tsongas was recently quoted as having said, ". . . look at Nicaragua and see Castro clones. We look at Nicaragua and see years of repression and



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inequity."* Accordingly, he and Dodd have called for increased American economic aid, while also sponsoring a measure forbidding military involvement in Central America without prior Congressional approval.

Although such sentiments are by no means universal among the Vietnam generation, they are surely characteristic of it and especially of its most prominent spokesmen. For this is a generation lacking not only memory of World War II, but, in a way, of the Vietnam War as well. Because of political reluctance to mobilize the country, probably never has a nation fought so protracted a struggle with such a small fraction of its population directly involved. Moreover, those of draft age during the 1960's had plentiful opportunities for avoiding military service. (Both Tsongas and Dodd, for example, were in the Peace Corps.) Even those who did serve in or support the war had experiences—defeat abroad, scorn or indifference at home—that were unlikely to sustain a willingness to "bear any burden" afterwards. The problem of the Vietnam generation is not just, as Podhoretz writes, a deficiency in "historical knowledge or understanding" that led it to conclude this war was uniquely evil. Rather, its own history has convinced it that wars are things others should fight.

For this reason, *Why We Were in Vietnam* is likely to have as much effect on the rising generation of American leaders as Churchill's calls for British rearmament had on the Oxford Union. The gap is not one of age but of experience. Contrary to popular belief, the Vietnam generation is not more idealistic than previous ones; it may even be less so. Its chief concerns, if surveys can be believed, are with careers, possessions and enjoying the kind of life that affluence is supposed to make possible. The history lesson Podhoretz provides may persuade its members that containing communism is a "noble cause" and that we acted morally in Vietnam. But it will do little to convince them that we—they—ought to make similar sacrifices elsewhere in the world. The failing of the Vietnam generation is not that it believes containing communism is wrong, but that it has come to view appeasing it as generally safer, more acceptable and less troublesome.

It took a worldwide catastrophe to bring the folly of this perception home to the Munich generation. The ominous question facing the West today is whether a similar debacle will be needed to awaken its successors. Judging from the current preoccupations of the leaders of the Vietnam generation, the answer would not be an optimistic one. Absurdly idealistic conceptions of human rights vie with impractical plans for economic development as reasons for withholding American support from beleaguered Central American countries. Almost effortlessly, the long-dead disarmament movement has come back to life and succeeded in turning the quixotic notion of ending the production of nuclear weapons into a serious grass-roots movement On both right and left, any suggestion to revive a military draft gets little support, and even increases in the defense budget run into serious opposition. In short, of all the casualties of the Vietnam War, the greatest and most costly may yet prove to be realism about foreign affairs.

By clearing away much of the moral posturing that accompanied the debate over Vietnam, Podhoretz has performed a useful service both for his own generation and for the next. However, *Why We Were in Vietnam* will achieve little if it merely encourages the Vietnam generation to replace one set of moral convictions with another, while leaving untouched its illusory policies and reluctance to act. What is needed now is a debate within that generation over which burdens it is willing to assume, which hardships it is willing to meet to assure the survival of liberty. The outcome of that will determine the future of American foreign policy. □

*New York Times,* April 5, 1982, p. A-20.

# Coming of Old Age

**Herbert Gold: *Family;* Arbor House; New York.**

**Dave Smith: *Onliness;* Louisana State University Press; Baton Rouge.**

**Larry Woiwode: *Poppa John;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

**by Edward J. Walsh**

The themes of these three novels, one of which is not a novel at all, intersect in ways that are both bittersweet and eloquent. They are about elderly people, which seems at first unremarkable. More precisely, they are about elderly people *and* those who are not old, and who, perhaps, ought to be readers of Gold, Smith, and Woiwode. After all, no one knows the intimate sense of growing old better than those who acknowledge that they are in their last years. The young, whether they are social workers or graduate students in psychology, simply cannot comprehend what it means to be beyond the midpoint of one's life and cognizant of having completed—or failed—one's life's tasks. The young understand only that aging is a process before which we all are powerless.

To say that time is the ultimate arbiter of human existence is to do no more than nod at the most common of denominators. Yet for the young it is easily forgotten, because time stretches out before them, vague and never-ending, signaling only wonder and promise. For the old, though, time must loom somberly: for some, out of fear, for others, simply because nothing can be done about it.

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The publication of these books, therefore, is significant, if only because they deal sensitively with old age. In truth, the old have often been the subject of important literature—witness *King Lear*. However, in recent decades the torrent of fiction, poetry, drama and liberal sociology has been centered obsessively on youth, particularly the radical youth of the 60's. In the late 70's, as if cued by the denoument of Vietnam, a new demographic fixation emerged in hard-cover publishing and produced books advising hip, thirtyish college graduates how to be hyperassertive, how to get the most from the opposite sex in the shortest time, how to dress—as if this age group really had to be taught such things. It was no coincidence, then, that few books which expressed interest in or respect for the aged were written during these years. The 60's and 70's were a time of burgeoning government solicitousness on behalf of the underprivileged, including the elderly. But government social-welfare programs provide chiefly for the physical upkeep of those who can't afford it themselves. It is the maintenance of the spirit that is the theme of Gold's, Smith's and Woiwode's books. Each author details the efforts of his aged characters to hold on to what they believe is their place in the world. In this, Herbert Gold's mother, Frieda Volk Frankel Gold, in his memoir, *Family,* is triumphant. She proves that there can be a magic in growing old. For her, motherhood and wifehood become even more complex when her two sons leave the nest than in the frantic years when they were young. She hatches innocent plots to keep them and her husband fascinated by her. She is the center of their lives, not because she is domineering, but because she recognizes that their heartaches and exhilarations are somehow reflections of hers.

Gold's book is actually a biography of his mother, tracing her family from the Ukraine to Cleveland. Frieda grew up in wonder and curiosity at America, about which her mother said matter-of-factly, "In America you can prefer one thing to another and then you can do the thing you prefer, unless you have to do the other thing." Frieda did what she preferred. She confides in her son Herbert that at seventeen she married a much older man, a pharmacist who needed a wife and who would give her security. But security was not what she wanted. Shortly after the wedding, while the pharmacist stacked magazines, she jumped into her brother's truck and was gone. She tells Herbert this as she tries to make sense of his affair with a married woman and instructs him precisely on where to find happiness: in independence to be sure, but also in a useful career as a professional man, as a graduate of Case Western, then in marriage, children—her grandchildren.

Her son wanders uneasily—from coast to coast, through two marriages, never sure of anything except, as the years go by, that his mother has been right about most things. He sees, with a touch of sadness, how his daughter resembles not her mother (his first wife) but his own mother. "The family should be together again, it really should, Dad," the girl

tells him. Gold himself becomes a grandparent and grows old, but his mother never seems to. Dutifully, he visits regularly as his father sinks with Parkinson's disease and hardened arteries. Frieda never gives up on either of them, clasping the frayed ends of her family together even as the extended members, ex-wives and children of divorce grow distant and formal, with all the accompanying regrets. She still fixes Gold's favorite dishes when he returns. Through her, her son and his readers relearn some truths about motherhood: it is ageless, the first fact of family life, and it grows wherever it is transplanted. As Gold writes:

> Love is always asking, deciphering, plus *asking*. Finally I needed to learn that this other way was my mother's love, it was what Hilda and Anna brought through the dangerous mountain-high waves of the Atlantic. It is a kind of love, and I could cleave to my American desires, but I had better also accept her terms. It was what she was serving.

That is, memory, "moments of pain and thrill, and the dream images of the past." Frieda understands, far better than her son, that the past is the key to the future. Gold sees that much and acknowledges it. He makes us do so as well.

Smith's *Onliness* is less lyrical and pleasant. It is a tale of the confrontation between a hardbitten, independent old man, Tom Zucold, who runs a ramshackle auto-repair shop (Bowie Garage) in Chapel, Virginia, and the Citizen's Committee, which wants to close him down. Says Zucold, "They want everything modernized, what they call it. Can't stand nothing old. Probably 'cause they getting old." Smith is scrupulously faithful to the jagged-glass idiom of the backwoods mountain South, which makes his book a trial to read.

Tom Zucold picks up a semiliterate hitchhiker whom he calls "The Grip" because of his viselike handshake, and he informally takes him on as an apprentice at the Bowie Garage.

Tom's activities are modest: he follows the exploits of a champion pool shooter, the Carolina Kid, and introduces The Grip to a local nymphomaniac, Promise Land, who turns out to be connected by family to the villianous Citizen's Committee. The novel traces the education of The Grip at the hands of Tom Zucold and Promise Land, who teach him about



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onliness: "If there really is that secret essential you down under all those layers of skin and bone and fluid and personality, the chances are that it is always and permanently alone. You can't touch it. Nobody can touch it." In her breezy way, Promise Land lets The Grip know that he must make a choice: either he abandons Tom Zucold, who is doomed, or he sticks with him. Zucold explains that the Committee is harassing him to death: "Say this is the Committee and you got to gimmee or get . . . But ittis why we got to hang on, boy. We is the hope. We is the continuity. It is we against the Citizen's Committee, because the Citizen's Committee is us. Goddamn peoples don't understand we got to live in the past. Ittis all the Bowie Garage is, see." The story ends with a surreal, bloody battle, Zucold and Grip vs. the Committee, which destroys Zucold, Promise Land and the Garage. The Grip is left standing beside another highway, back where he started, but at least in the possession of his "onliness."

Smith's book is a jarringly familiar allegory. The old are shunted aside, especially when they resemble Tom Zucold: crotchety, impatient, intolerant. Sadly, this is often the way of the aged. But it is tragic that the believers in "progress," whatever that may embody, are so often the winners in feuds like this.

Woiwode's *Poppa John* is an intense study of one old man, its power and pathos reminiscent of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea.* The story is of one day in the life of "Poppa John," an over-the-hill soap opera actor who played a venerable old man by that name. The character, who quoted wisely but shallowly from Scripture, attracted such a personal following that the show's producers eventually felt it necessary to kill him off. Poppa John was thus forcibly retired, written out of the script. He is obsessed with his video self, reminding himself constantly of who he was before the camera—"it was estimated that more viewers of every age and sort had watched his death than the funeral of young President Kennedy." Now, after being accustomed to an income of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, he is nearly broke. Woiwode's writing is powerful as he described Poppa John confronting a bank teller as he makes a withdrawal for Christmas shopping; it is a skillful illustration of the perennial skepticism of the young towards the old.

As he wanders about New York the day before Christmas Eve, Poppa John's old world of fantasy blends with the aimlessness of the present. The memories of the deference he received flood back as he watches the indifferent crowds around him. The agony of recognition overpowers him. Finally he is accosted by former "fans" who dote on him as a real-life hero. His pride wells up, and, as he is about to violate the commands of God which he once quoted melodramatically in the television studio, his remembrance of the Scripture affects him in a profound moment of epiphany. Poppa John, former TV personality, recognizes himself for what he is: not just an old man, but an old man created in the image of God. Woiwode's prose here is beautiful and reverent. The final chapter describes Poppa John's reunion with his wife in the hospital where he has been taken. He learns only then that she, whom he had taken for granted for so long, has loved him every moment. She alone, of all his audience, saw in his television "death" the metaphor of his real one, and the painful salvation that followed it. He understands through her the meaning of love and the meaning of faith.

These books teach many lessons, but, fundamentally, they suggest a change in the direction of contemporary literature —away from preoccupation with the temporal and chic "lifestyle" perspective that is itself already ebbing, towards some deeper, more timeless truths. That is not to say the works of Gold, Smith, and Woiwode will become landmarks. But they are at least a touchstone to which literature may pay homage. □

# The Liberal Ghost Dance

**Bennett M. Berger: *The Survival of a Counterculture: Ideological Work and Everyday Life among Rural Communards;* University of California Press; Berkeley; California.**

**Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue;* University of Notre Dame Press; Notre Dame, Indiana.**

**by E. Christian Kopff**

Your house is beginning to collapse around you, the plaster drifting down to settle on the carpets, the rain dripping onto the chairs and forming puddles on the table. Most of us would do one of two things: try to fix the leaks and cracks or leave the house for a better one.

*Dr. Kopff is professor of classics at the University of Colorado.*

When your intellectual house starts to crumble, the choices expand. Some check to make sure the foundations are sound and then start the laborious work of restoration and retouching; others boldly walk out to find a new place to live, without bothering to lock the door behind them. Many, however, will continue to live in their collapsing house, professing themselves pleased with the new ease of obtaining fresh water, commenting on the new patterns on the rug.

The archetype of those who will not confront change and the collapse of their intellectual homes is an Indian known as the Shawnee Prophet. He began the Ghost Dance, a movement that spread during the 19th century to most Indians in the American West. When the idea was in its most virulent form, large groups of Indians believed that if they danced the Ghost Dance, the white



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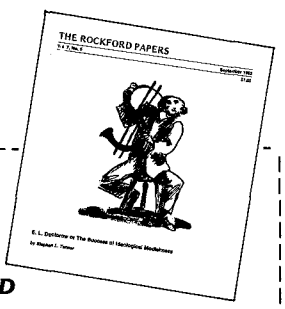


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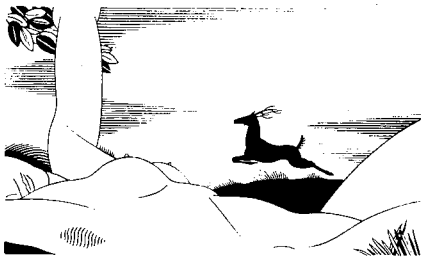
man's bullets would not harm them. This belief lay behind such well-known Indian experiences as William Henry Harrison's victory at Tippecanoe Creek and the famous Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890.

Whether to accept new and challenging intellectual conditions under the pressure of changing events that one's ideas cannot accommodate, or to dance the Ghost Dance, is a choice many cultures have had to face. Today that choice faces socialism and its kinky offshoot, American liberalism.

Bennett M. Berger, a sociology professor in southern California, has written a book defending sociology (the means) and a rural commune (the end). He has spent his academic career using such concepts as "cultural lag" to show that the beliefs of the ordinary American are selfish, incoherent, counterproductive; that they do not respond to the real world. "Ideological work" is the thinking and acting that people must do to live in a world that does not reward or even correspond to their system of beliefs. Either you do ideological work or you compromise. Everybody does both to some extent.

Until a few years ago, the world seemed to be moving in one (good) direction toward one far-off secular event. Now that movement has been stymied. Among the flotsam and jetsam left by the retreating tide are scores of communes founded in the 60's and early 70's. In pursuit of grant money, Berger agreed to study them. He has chosen "The Ranch," a "secular," "open" or "anarchist" commune, to show that the dream still lives, that ideological work here makes sense and, beyond that, that sociology (up to this point in Berger's hands a perpetual solvent of beliefs and institutions) is capable of understanding and making sense of a culture, of defending it, when that culture is sane and healthy.

Both book and commune seem to be failures. In the area of sexual openness, the Ranch never progressed beyond an exchange of partners. Feminism hit it like a tidal wave and, though the school run by the commune continues to make it financially viable, by 1979 the remaining communards consisted of six bisexual



women and three hapless men with nowhere else to go. Berger seeks signs of sexual activity and drug use among the children but, alas, he comes up empty-handed. "The Ranch seems to have become increasingly traditional about drug use by children, acknowledging that it occurs routinely in nearby communes, but denying that it occurs among their own children." He consoles himself that the Ranch has somewhat less "age grading"—keeping children in their places and out of decision-making—than in other American families. This is not the only indication that Professor Berger is unfamiliar with suburban America.

The Ranch has lasted twelve years, a decade longer than most communes that lack "formal religious organization" or a charismatic leader. Its population has shrunk and it seems to be dying, though Berger denies this. Even his refusal to see religious roots is dubious. On his last trip, a visiting rabbi was conducting bas mitzvah's for two children. Earlier Bonnie, a recent Christian convert, had left her husband, Abe, and taken their daughter, Swallow, to a local Christian commune. The Ranch tried to rescue the child. It seems tendentious of Berger to deny the Ranch clear, if not "formal," religious identification. And if the parents want their children bas mitzvahed and kept from drugs and sex, where is the hippie, flower-child openness that Berger wants to praise?

The commune experience, usually headed by charismatic leaders or connected with established religious ideas, began as a reaction against Future Shock, much as the Indian Ghost Dance movement did. Most communards have returned to the surrounding world. The few communes that have not repudiated the extreme forms of untraditionalism, of hope in drugs and sex and promiscuity, have maintained them only with the authority of a charismatic leader. The Ranch has survived by edging back toward traditional norms. Even the embrace of feminism is largely a repudiation of selfish liberal or libertarian male behavior. Professor Berger, tenured and well paid at a California university, dispenses his grant money and calls upon others to try the life of drugs and amorphous sex, of freedom from roles and age-grading. All too many can say, with Huck Finn, "I bin there." Berger urges them to begin the Ghost Dance, to ignore reality. But the birth of children has corrupted the Ranch's dream of innocent promiscuity and drug-induced nirvanas. It is one thing to risk your own life or sanity for the Great Spirit; the prospect of offering up one's child has proved to be a sobering one.

Berger is obsessed with proving the worth of sociology to an uncomprehending world of conservatives and patriots. When Abe, "poet, bard, reciter of Upanishads," defends sociology to the inhabitants of the Ranch, who instinctively distrust both it and Berger, he "pointed out to my prosecutors," as Berger writes, "that two generations of social-science ethnography (he cited Benedict, Mead, and the Lynds by name), by bringing home the message of cultural relativism to the American public, had gone far to create the atmosphere of tolerance for 'deviants,' permitting them to live, relatively unharassed, in the style that they had chosen. And rather than regard social science as their enemy, they had every reason to be grateful to it for furthering progress and enlightenment and toleration for unusual life styles. . . . I had never heard a more persuasive defense of our business," comments Berger.



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Alasdair MacIntyre does not see it that way. Cultural relativism, by denying the validity of the concept man, has rendered ethics irrational, has made it impossible to have a science of ethics or even to discuss ethical issues rationally. Is abortion murder or freedom of choice? How does one decide? Passionate letters to the editor in newspapers reveal the plight of modern ethical discussion. People want to proclaim, "This is bad," but all they can say is, "I disapprove of this."

MacIntyre's intellectual journey takes him back to Hume and Kant and Kierkegaard and forward to such contemporary thinkers as Rawls, Nozick and Goffman. MacIntyre seems to have progressed from a Marxist repudiation of liberalism to a search for how one can, as he felt he must, repudiate Marxism without falling back into what he had rejected. He ends up with a commitment to the idea of Man. If that concept is not philosophically valid, if it is not correct to reason from it, then Nietzsche is right, and all ethics and moralities must be intellectually disreputable, mere disguises for self-will. And what if that concept is valid? What if Man, as well as men, does exist as a rationally willed animal, conditioned by time, place, biology and history, yet able to reach valid general conclusions by means of his access to rational thought? One conclusion: the rational discussion of ethical issues becomes possible again. As MacIntyre sees it, philosophy has been lost in a Serbonian Bog for the past two hundred years—liberalism, Marxism, Kantianism, existentialism and all other philosophies that base man's actions on his will (MacIntyre lumps them all under the name "emotivism") are wrong.

MacIntyre is hesitant about telling us the rational answers to the debates over abortion, pacificism, homosexuality and so on. This is only one book, and one does not want to be banned from the faculty parties, after all. With this new, or old, Ariadne's Thread, however, he can find answers, strengths and weaknesses in all kinds of debates, some of them moral or political, like those of Rawls and Nozick, some liberal and Marxist, even some aesthetic. For the virtues deduced from the idea of Man to make sense, they must form part of a connected and coherent sequence, a narrative. Suddenly one sees that it does make a difference, a moral difference, if one views life as an Absurdist drama or as a traditional novel, or if the novel itself is seen as fulfilled when composed as a "stream of consciousness" or in the narrative conventions that reach back to the ancient epic. One can tell, or at least know how to tell, a good novel from a poor one. One can distinguish a deviant individual from a normal one; the very words, deviant and normal, become useful again. Human fulfillment has a meaning and is more than just an excuse for possible perversion or self-destruction. The literature and philosophy and people of the past become more comprehensible and interesting and even exciting.

Alasdair MacIntyre has walked out of the crumbling house of modernity—call it socialism, Marxism, liberalism, emotivism or whatever—and has not even bothered to lock the door behind him. He has found a new dwelling, one with firm and tested foundations. It has not been lived in for a while and so needs some fixing up. In this new house, things that were mere useless bric-a-brac, people that were boring or silly in the old house have become useful and attractive. MacIntyre has found new meaning in St. Benedict, Sophocles, St. Thomas Aquinas, Jane Austen and many other people he probably had not thought about for a long time. The new house is not only attractive, it is beginning to feel comfortable, perhaps because it is not just a new dwelling; it is home.

One need not worry about the old house being left empty and forlorn. It is still crowded with Bennett Berger (though without his commune) and John Kenneth Galbraith and a mélange of French and Italian Marxists. There are many familiar faces. Something is going on in the back yard that sounds like a cross between a cocktail party and a political convention. If one peers over the back fence one can see clearly what these folks are doing: they are dancing the Liberal Ghost Dance. □

# An Unfair Argument of a Fair Scholar

**Shlomo Avineri: *The Making of Modern Zionism;* Basic Books; New York.**

**by Paul Gottfried**

Shlomo Avineri's study of the Zionist movement examines eighteen indisputable pioneers of modern Jewish nationalism. Beginning his survey with Nachman Krochmal, an early 19th-century Jewish Hegelian who lived in Austrian Poland and wrote in Hebrew, Avineri then provides portraits of later Jewish nationalists including Hebrew poet Achad Haam, socialist collaborator of Marx Moses Hess, rabbinic mystic Isaac Kook, Nietzschean admirer of power politics Zev Jabotinski and the first Israeli premier, David Ben-Gurion. Avineri brings to his work an impressive set of credentials. A longtime theoretician of the Israeli Labor Party, he is better known among American scholars for his writings on Hegel and Marx. As one who has worked in his field, I respect his thorough research and balanced judgments. Despite what I view as our insurmountable political differences, I have always marvelled at Avineri's resistance to committing interpretative dishonesty. American radicals have been understandably hard on him not only for his support of Israel but for his failure to commit intellectual fraud. He reads documents like a scholar, and not like one who tries to find a "scien-

*Dr. Gottfried is a frequent contributor to the* Chronicles.



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tific" basis for the Soviet denunciations of American imperialism.

However, despite his encyclopedic grasp of his latest subject, Avineri has fallen below my expectations in treating it. He misinterprets the ties between the Jewish people and the Western world as egregiously as many of the current leaders of American Jewish organizations. Western civilization, in both its Christian and bourgeois aspects, is made to appear hostile to Judaism. Avineri, by stressing the "revolutionary socialist" character of Jewish nationalism, leaves no doubt where he wishes to have his fellow Jews stand in the struggle between Western capitalism and Eastern collectivism. In his published reminiscences about a trip to Israel, Saul Bellow records his shock upon hearing Avineri hold forth on the socioeconomic advances in the Eastern bloc. Bellow notes with perplexity Avineri's lack of interest in the political oppression in those societies he praised.

It is plain that Avineri would like to associate Jews and Israel with the non-Western socialist world. Like many contemporary liberals and self-styled Jewish spokesmen, he identifies Jews with the putative victims of Western bigotry and economic exploitation. The enemy is always middle-class and Christian.

This outlook may be partly derived from filtered folk memories out of the European Jewish past. Most American Jews are descended from the former inhabitants of what was once the Pale of Settlement in Eastern Europe. Created under Tsarina Catherine the Great in the wake of the first Polish partition as a province for her newly acquired Jewish subjects, the Pale was eventually used to restrict the movement of Jews within the Russian Empire. The residents were afflicted with political and vocational disabilities that were justified on religious and national grounds, since Jews were neither members of the state church nor classified as Russians. In view of this situation, it is hardly surprising that a disproportionately large number of Eastern European Jews joined revolutionary movements. Among those who came to America, a large number were secular socialists. These immigrants were far less Westernized and politically more radical than the German and Sephardic Jews already here.

The experience of the Holocaust seemed to vindicate for many American Jews their identification with the left. For those already with leftist loyalties, it was possible to consider Hitler a reactionary Western leader who, with the complicity of Christians everywhere, aspired to wipe out both Jews and their allies on the left. This distorted view can only be sustained by ignoring certain historical facts.

The oppression of Jews in Eastern Poland and White Russia under tsarist rule did not correspond to the much more favorable political situation that then existed for their coreligionists in Austrian-ruled southern Poland and in German-held northwest Poland. And while there has been a tradition of Christian anti-Semitism extending back into the Middle Ages, the memory of prejudice which American Jews carry with them comes, for the most part, out of an Eastern European experience. This hardship among Eastern Jews was quantitatively different from the conditions prevalent among Western Jews since the 18th century. Although anti-Semitic sentiments found social and political expression in Western and Central Europe during the 19th century, to whatever extent middle-class values and capitalist institutions penetrated that society, Jews were the ones who benefited most. It is entirely understandable that nazism was not only anti-Jewish, but anticapitalist and opposed to such middle-class attitudes as respect for property and the privacy of family life. Hitler and his henchmen drew upon the cumulative resentment of many of their countrymen, both on the left and on the extreme right, against the achievements of the European bourgeoisie, particularly their readiness to incorporate Jews into the Western world as economic and political—if not always social—equals.

The view which angst-ridden Christians have hastened to embrace, that the nazis were the continuators of Christian anti-Semitism, is also twisted. Some Christian anti-Semites may have occasionally collaborated with nazis, but Hitler was quite explicit in rejecting Christian morality in favor of his own brand of Teutonic paganism. He actively persecuted churchmen and marked out whole Christian nations, like Poland, for annihilation. Moreover, it was Christian capitalist Americans and Englishmen who resisted nazi aggression even at the price of an alliance with Hitler's former collaborator, atheist Soviet Russia. Ecclesiastics throughout the Western world, and even in Germany at the risk of their lives, denounced nazi racism: more Christians died combating Hitler than have perished in all wars against communist states. Yet, unhappily, the lie persists that nazism and right-wing anti-Semitism are widespread endemic diseases of the Christian West. Some leaders of Jewish organizations decry public manifestations of Christian religiosity and warn American Jewry against the embraces of even the most effusively philo-Semitic Moral Majoritarians. Ironically, a few campaign to have the Ten Commandments eliminated from the walls of American schools, thereby helping to realize Hitler's aim of removing the "Jewish conscience" from Western morality.

Although Avineri has little use for the Christian West, he has even harsher feelings for the capitalist West. In his concluding chapter he vents his contempt for Milton Friedman, whom he describes as the "Jew of the Diaspora," who urges other Jews to ignore the socialist imperative of their national revolution. Capitalism, even more than Christianity, is seen as the source of Western hatred of the Jews, and Avineri hails two radical Zionists who lived at the beginning of the century, Nachman Syrkin and Ber Borochov, for trying to fuse Jewish nationalism with a Marxist view of history. In their understanding of the Jews as eternal proletariat, they obviously anticipated Avineri's own conception



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and help him to ride one of his own hobbyhorses: that corporate capitalism, because of its "internal tensions," produced nazism and thereby the Holocaust. Utilizing the theories of Syrkin, Avineri predicts further anti-Semitic explosions as both the victims and the benefactors of capitalism try to find scapegoats for the defects of the system.

It must be said in fairness that Avineri does not serve up the *plat du jour* found in most Marxist discourse about the rise of nazism. To his credit, he does not present Hitler as a mere tool of German or Western capitalism, nor does he state that the German *Grosskapitalisten* were the most decisive group in bringing Hitler to power. Instead of seeking to revive these discredited fictions, Avineri resorts to structural arguments. First he instructs how the capitalist system *must* operate and then points out how its supposedly inevitable class antagonisms are causes of both past and future disasters.

Like many leftists, Avineri ultimately falls victim to his own false vision. Because he is both a Jewish nationalist and a hater of Western capitalism, he distorts the past by depicting Jewry as a victim of bourgeois civilization, when it actually has benefited from it. Unlike German economist Werner Sombart, who despised capitalism and disliked Jews for advancing it, Avineri does violence to Jewish history to create a phony contradiction between what he hates and what he presumes to like. He rejects flesh-and-blood people in favor of spurious metaphysics. Avineri wishes to have a Jewish nation without its ancient religion and a Jewish community purified of the mercantile values that have been a part of Jewish existence since the Talmudic period in Babylonia. He emphatically declares: "Laissez-faire in an Israeli context means bringing Exile back to Israel." But what would he substitute for the economic doctrines scorned: a warmed-over version of that Marxism which some of his Eastern European precursors had obviously learned during the Exile? Irresponsibly, he never addresses the question of what makes Marxism, or secular socialism, more authentically Jewish than what Jews have actually taught and done for the last two thousand years. In this evasion, he shows himself to be an heir of the Zionist-socialists, who liked to attribute all Jewish habits and values that deviated from their secular-collectivist norm to the unfortunate legacy of Jewish exile. The argument—like most of Avineri's book—simply won't wash. □

# On Irishmen & Assorted Losers

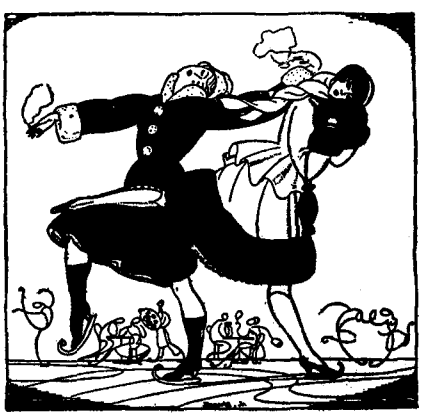
**James M. Cain: *The Baby in the Icebox and Other Short Fiction;* Holt, Rinehart and Winston; New York.**

**Frank O'Connor: *Collected Stories;* Alfred A. Knopf; New York.**

**by Diane Long Hoeveler**

James Cain is of Irish descent, third-generation American. Frank O'Connor was an Irish writer who did not flee his homeland, but instead stayed, studied it and tried to get his fellow citizens to see clearly both its beauty and its misery. One would think, then, that the short stories of these two writers would be very different. In many ways they are. But in reading these two collections side by side, one sees a startling similarity. Both present what can only be called the diseases of modern life with the clear, concise scrutiny of scientists examining their specimens under a microscope. Although one is based in Ireland, the "old" world, and one in America, the "new," both artists are obsessed with the alienation produced by modern, industrial society, the corruption of marriage and family relationships, absent or indifferent religious institutions and the nihilism that arises when one is forced to live in a society with no social cohesion or accepted conventions.

The America depicted in Cain's collection is the America of the Eastern seaboard or the far West, the so-called promised land of California. Into this world drift garage mechanics, frustrated wives, out-of-work freight riders, convicts, snake oil salesmen and other assorted losers. Their stories are seldom dramatic or suspenseful, and for Cain that is the point. Unlike his most famous works, *The Postman Always Rings Twice, Double Indemnity* and *Mildred Pierce,* these stories show Cain in the tradition of the more realistic H.L. Mencken and Ring Lardner. Here he is concerned with the foibles and follies of the American rube, the man or woman with no education, or such a limited education that he or she is left with no moral guidelines or values by which to act. Similarly, O'Connor once observed that storytelling "doesn't deal with problems; it doesn't have any solutions to offer; it just states the human condition." But O'Connor is being unfair to the complexity of his own work here, for his



stories do deal with a number of problems, and, although they never preach and aren't didactic, they offer one consistent solution to the problems that beset Ireland as well as the modern

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world. O'Connor advocates generosity, compassion and forgiveness, a sense of truth and honesty, and the self-knowledge that makes all of these values possible. O'Connor's collection of stories about the people whom he knew in Cork often remind one of James Joyce's collection, *Dubliners.* But O'Connor disliked Joyce's style, feeling that it overshadowed the content of his work. Instead, he adopted a 19th-century model, Stendhal, and compared his own fiction to a mirror dawdling down a road. But Joyce and O'Connor have this in common: both present provincial and urban Irish people and situations that are also universal in nature, so that Dublin and Cork become microcosms of the modern world.

Both Cain and O'Connor were trained to a certain extent by World War I, and both of them wrote their first stories about it, Cain focusing on life in the trenches ("The Taking of Montfaucon" and "It Breathed") and O'Connor on life in a POW camp ("Guests of the Nation"). The war serves, then, as a great initiator into the modern century, a symbol of its violence, futility and ambivalent morality. For Cain the war is as pointless as the soldier who takes the wrong fork in the road, while for O'Connor the war turns decent men into cogs in a mindless and heartless death machine.

In addition to war, both Cain and O'Connor dealt with the decay of marriage vows and its deleterious effect on children. Although the most famous Cain stories concern wives who deceive, an equal number of stories invert the pattern. This collection contains a little-known novella, "The Embezzler," in which the bank teller husband uses his wife in an elaborate scheme to embezzle a fortune. And in "The Baby in the Icebox" it is the husband who turns a hungry tiger on his wife and baby because he suspects that she has been unfaithful. Cain's point is that betrayal is the chief crime that one human being can commit against another, and it is particularly deadly when spouses are at odds.

Neither Cain nor O'Connor tried to establish himself as an avant-garde stylist; indeed, both wrote as if *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway* had never been written. Their stylistic patterns derive from an older tradition. Cain, like Twain, reveled in American dialect and the uncultured slang of the West; O'Connor utilizes the expressions of the Irishman, the "begors," "divils" and "mudders." Apart from their use of regional dialects, both experiment with the limited point of view. The point of view in Cain's story, "Dead Man," is that of a man ironically named Lucky, a drifter who accidently kills a railroad detective while bumming a ride on a freight. Although he succeeds in establishing a foolproof alibi for himself, Lucky turns himself in to the police when he reads the victim's obituary in the newspaper. We see with this man's narrow perspective, we experience his threadbare existence during the Great Depression and we agonize at his self-incrimination.

The theme of guilt and confession run through O'Connor's work, as well. Obviously, in a country that uses its religious institutions as a means of control, the confessional and the priest often recur. In "The Cheat" a priest comes to a man's house to tell him that he is dying of cancer and has just three months to live. Is the "cheat" of the story the priest, who has resorted to this last trick to win the soul of the unbeliever, or the wife who turns to religion to accept her husband's illness? Conversely, O'Connor made light of the power of the confessional in "First Confession," in which a young boy confesses that he has schemed to kill his grandmother, only to be given sympathy and candy by the priest.

The point of view in O'Connor is quite frequently that of the child. "My Oedipus Complex" is told by a young boy who becomes insanely and humorously jealous when his father returns from the war and displaces the boy in the mother's bed. But, O'Connor also tells the pathetic stories of the lost children of Ireland, the illegitimates, born in secrecy in England and dumped on small farms in the Irish countryside. These confused children live only for visits from their "aunties" and cling to vague dreams of normal family life. The most powerful and poignant, "The Weeping Children," is told from the English husband's point of view. He has married an Irish woman and had a child with her, and then learns that she has deserted an illegitimate child in Ireland. He is, above all of O'Connor's characters, a hero. He travels to Ireland to retrieve the child, taking her from a house filled with other nameless children. As he drives away,

> . . . he turned to wave to the little group of children. They stood in the roadway, their presents clutched in their hands, and he saw that they were all weeping quietly. It seemed to him that they were not weeping as real children weep, with abandonment and delight, but hopelessly, as old people weep whom the world has passed by. He was the world and he had passed them by.

In this story we see O'Connor's values most clearly. He endorsed the moral and social obligations all of us have, both personally and collectively; but he also recognized that no one can save the world. There will always be weeping children.

It's difficult to give adequate expression to the literary complexity of these two collections of stories. Taken together they form a transatlantic panorama of life from World War I through the Depression and World War II. It is ironic that the strongest and most ambitious Irishmen in O'Connor's stories propel themselves to America, as to a new life, freed from the narrow and constricting burdens of Catholicism. But when we see the second- and third-generation Irish in some of Cain's stories they are in more difficult straits. In the new world they pursue jobs that don't materialize and spouses who betray them with frightening casualness. They are truly living among the morally dead. □



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COMMENDABLES

# In Defense of Pure Reason

**Ellen Wilson:** ***An Even Dozen;*** Human Life Press; New York.

by William McGurn

Ellen Wilson doubtless would be surprised and possibly horrified at being called a rationalist, but a rationalist she is (with a small *r*), in the finest sense of that word. The conflict today is not, as some might suppose, between faith and reason, but rather between illuminated reason and utter barbarity, hedonism and what we call civilization. For we live in a time when serious thought is held in disdain, and books such as Miss Wilson's *An Even Dozen* are passed over in favor of the lifestyle sections of *People* magazine.

*An Even Dozen* is Miss Wilson's first book, a collection of twelve essays whose subjects range from gay liberation to the nuclear family, and her light touch is girded by a solid intellectual appreciation of the Western ethos. In prose that is at once calm and provocative, and occasionally humorous, Miss Wilson writes on the fundamental problems of our society *qua* society. The central focus of the book is suggested in her third essay, "Mother Didn't Know":

> Here I am not focusing on changed behavior . . . but the transformation of the *norm*—of society's expectation of us—and the consequent need to make a choice. If hypocrisy is the tribute that vice pays to virtue, has modern society decided to withhold payment, or has it merely changed the definition of virtue?

In an age when we are being told that promiscuity is nothing more than an advanced appetite for variety, that homosexuality is merely an "alternative lifestyle," that abortion is no more serious than, say, a tonsillectomy, these essays provide an oasis of sanity, a question mark to 20th-century sophism.

The *Human Life Review,* from which these essays are taken, is an intellectual journal primarily concerned with the issue of abortion, which has been legal since the 1973 Supreme Court decision. Abortion, though, did not evolve out of an ideological void, and its recent acceptance by our culture is primarily a symptom rather than a cause of a twisted ethic. It is just one part of a whole fabric of beliefs and assumptions that shapes the laws and customs of our society. Any serious analysis, then, must take these facts into consideration; *An Even Dozen* is one of a few sane attempts to do so.

This sanity, or reasonableness, marks all her pages, whether she is discussing the new philosophy propagated by women's magazines or analyzing the legal casuistry of the *Roe v. Wade* decision. One has an awareness that all these questions have been asked before—if not in the same form, at least in substance. Malcolm Muggeridge, in his introduction to the book, seized neatly on this aspect of the writing:

> It is as though Jane Austen were to be reincarnated to expound the pros and cons of contraception, the case for and against euthanasia, the future of marriage and the family, in the style and temper of her incomparable novels.

In the best tradition of the essay, Miss Wilson's pieces are personal, direct and, above all, intelligent.

In any collection of such writings, people are bound to have favorites, and my own is "Children Can Be Cruel," in which she describes children as "notorious scene-stealers" and "ego crushers," obviously writing from the rueful personal experience with siblings and cousins. She also demonstrates that the nature of the child/parent relationship, so much misunderstood these days, adds to the parent's adult life. "In fact," she says, "if a parent is determined to stick with the job of being a parent, and a good one, children will almost inevitably force him into maturity. Otherwise," she adds, "the competition is too keen."

In this, as in her other pieces, Ellen Wilson is again urging a return to a reasonable reason, a willingness to recognize that the traditional values—family, dignity, human life, children, etc.—are not merely the irrational prejudices of fundamentalist zealots, but are the basic principles of what we call civilization. "Don't ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up," said Chesterton, one of Miss Wilson's favorite writers. Like most sound advice, it is applicable to any age and, if *An Even Dozen* is any indication, Miss Wilson has apparently taken it to heart. □

*Mr. McGurn is assistant managing editor for* The American Spectator.

# Works and Days

***Like It Was: The Diaries of Malcolm Muggeridge;*** **Edited by John Bright-Holmes;** William Morrow & Co.; New York.

Imagine the tediousness of, say, the diaries of Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Then sit down with this collection of entries from Malcolm Muggeridge's diaries—from Russia, India, the United States, England—and see a man of wit, erudition and charm, qualities sorely lacking in many writers of today's world. If Muggeridge were to be transported back in time and space to a London coffee house where Johnson, Goldsmith, and the others had retired for an evening of conversation and port, he would hold his own, a statement that can be made about few now holding court in the salons of New York, Paris and London. Journalist, government agent, editor, lay preacher—Muggeridge was and is these and more. In this respect, too, he resembles the man of letters of the 18th century: extract the theological aspect, and Defoe certainly comes to mind. How puny other contemporaries appear when we consider that they are typically unable to make their way through the mundane world (i.e. buying gasoline and getting braces on the kids' teeth) unless they are given enormous advances by publishers and film producers and/or sinecures at major universities. To borrow an image from Pope: "There marched the bard and blockhead, side by side,/Who rhymed for hire, and patronized for pride."

Diaries, autobiographies—even biographies—must be ap-



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proached with a light tread, particularly when the subject of such a work is a writer, a member of that breed which is more self-conscious than any other, bar none. Muggeridge is no exception: during a holiday at Roquebrune-Cap Martin, he describes what he thinks to be a perfect day, then writes in the penultimate sentence, "That—for anyone who cares to know—is how I like to live. . . ." That statement, written in July 1949, is for us, today. This self-consciousness has both benefits and drawbacks for the reader, the former manifest in keen observations, the latter in subtle obfuscation of the self. There's no way of knowing how often Muggeridge wielded his brush to achieve chiaroscuro, but, nevertheless, his observations more than make up for any cosmetics.

Muggeridge has always been in the thick of things. Consequently, diary entries include comments on visits to and conversations with George Orwell, Anthony Powell, Graham Greene, Field Marshal Montgomery, Winston Churchill—and the list continues at some length. But this collection is more than mere chattiness; there is truth in it. Early on, Muggeridge went to the Soviet Union with his wife; he planned to live there, raise his family there. For him, like others, the system turned out to be a god that failed. He became disillusioned—or the scales fell from his eyes—very quickly. For Muggeridge, his dashed dream was but one of many failures. He had more than just a touch of young Werther in him; death and suicide are recurring thoughts. Many tend to think of Muggeridge with the hint of a halo about him; he is a man. Little more can be—or should be—said. □

## IN FOCUS

# Social History

**Oscar and Lilian Handlin: *A Restless People: Americans in Rebellion 1770-1787;*** Anchor Press; New York.

**by David R. Sands**

Social history is a genre that is still finding its feet. Its methodology has a few bugs to be worked out, but at its best, it can give us some sense of the dailiness of lives we are not living. Oscar and Lilian Handlin's effort possesses many of the discipline's virtues and not a few of its flaws.

*Mr. Sands is a graduate student at Tufts University.*

The thesis of *A Restless People* is that in the vital formative years of the republic we Americans were agile and busy in almost every imaginable way. An unparalleled social mobility and a vast, empty continent left Americans either unsatisfied or insecure. It would seem tautological to hold that a deeply divided people engaged in the Enlightenment's equivalent of a war for national liberation was restless: torpor is not usually a revolutionary attribute. But the Handlins' idea of restlessness goes deeper, and they demonstrate that early American provincialism and distrust of Old World hierarchical models had set the colonials adrift from the philosophical and social moorings that had provided communal continuity in Europe.

So far, so good. As a hypothesis in the history of social thought and the evolution of institutions in this country, it has considerable merit. But the Handlins prove far less satisfactory at constructing an empirical foundation upon which to base these conclusions. As is customary with social historians, they rely on what might be called the "popular record"—diary entries, newspaper clips, children's primers, numerous anecdotes. Some of these nuggets prove illuminating, others do not. Writing a mass biography is difficult since the masses do not keep a collective journal. Generalizations come easily to the Handlins. To prove the dubious thesis that postwar "mutual dependence sharpened the vision of citizens, who scrutinized the performance of their neighbors" to "detec[t] shortcomings," the authors cite Alexander Hamilton, George Washington and a then-contemporary French consul. The authors apparently find these observers somehow representative, but they fail to show how.

A more serious (and irritating) defect is the relentlessness with which the authors expose that restlessness. The populace they describe must have suffered from a giant collective ulcer. Everything—religion and the lack of it, family, work, joblessness, noise in the streets, fear of fire, health standards, overcrowding, isolation, wartime deprivations, peacetime uncertainties—seems to have pressed in on our anxious, harried, dissatisfied forefathers. Life was never easy—and the Handlins show just how hard it was. But constant skittishness hardly sounds realistic.

Their work commands attention, however, when they refrain from grinding this unfortunate axe, as in the chapters on the provisional nature of American society and on the arts in America. (Surprisingly, American culture, in its undiluted, parochial self-assurance, does not reflect at all the supposed general anxiety and restlessness.) The scholarship is sound, the writing competent. As social historiography goes, its non-advocating, measured style makes it better than most of its more ideological cousins, but, even here, the book is better when it describes than when it argues. In short, *A Restless People* works best when it is not trying to prove its thesis. □

# Inscrutable History

**John Costello: *The Pacific War;*** Rawson, Wade Publishers; New York.

**by Alan J. Levine**

It is remarkable how American thinking about the Pacific War still runs to extremes. In 1970 and 1971, two highly touted tomes about the war of 1941–1945 appeared. The authors take diametrically opposite stances. John Toland's *The Rising Sun* is a whitewash of the Japanese; it pictures them as quasi-liberators of Asia from Western imperialism and claims that the war could easily have been avoided. David Bergamini's *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy* is an equally oversized, tendentious and tedious work that preserves the wartime American propaganda image of Japan and revives the myth of Hirohito as the real ruler of Japan rather than the figurehead he was.

*Dr. Levine is a historian living in New York.*



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You are aware that there has always been a "traditionalist" current in America representing the stance of conservatives who put a premium on Christian culture. You may even remember that in the mid-1960s, traditionalists rallied to produce a monthly journal of opinion—called *Triumph*—which, sadly, expired in the mid-70s, a victim of the times and its own excesses.

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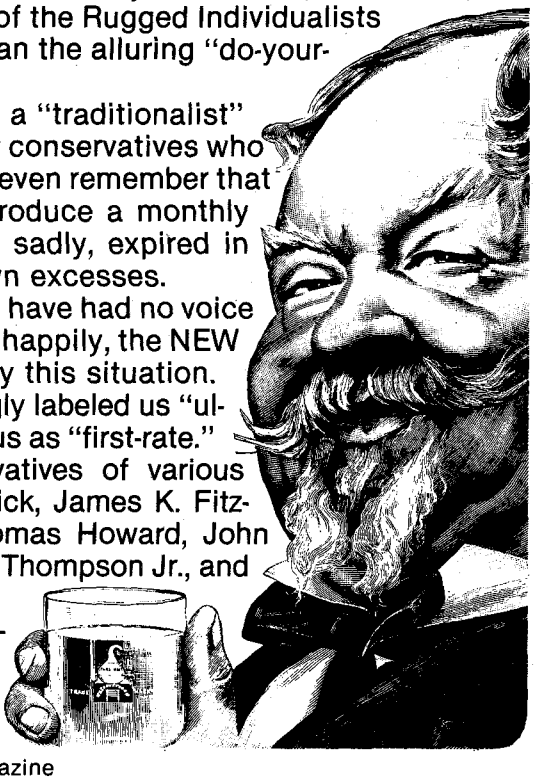

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John Costello, a British writer, has written a new history of the war that avoids both of the ideological traps sprung by Messrs. Toland and Bergamini. Unfortunately, it falls into some others. Though Costello supplies some new information and gives the reader a fairly sound overview of the war, he is regrettably clumsy and careless in his treatment of many small details. There are almost endless mistakes in numbers and descriptions of military equipment and units. For example, the Japanese did not think it would take a hundred divisions to conquer Australia; they thought it would take ten or twelve. Military units are mislabeled: the 39th Australian Battalion in New Guinea and the U.S. Army's 161st Regiment on Guadalcanal are both called "divisions." "Pistol Pete," which tormented the Americans on Guadalcanal, was a conventional artillery piece, not a "mortar." Contrary to Costello's implication, our main fleet *did* cover MacArthur's landing at Hollandia. And American P-40 fighters could not have escorted MacArthur's bombers to Taiwan in 1941.

There are also questionable or mistaken interpretations. The most significant Japanese loss in the Coral Sea battle was not the sinking of one light carrier, but the fact that damaged and downed aircraft kept two *big* carriers out of the Midway battle. It is rather doubtful whether Admiral Yamamoto's death was a great blow to Japan, though many other writers agree with Costello that it was.

The new information in Costello's book concerns the origins of the war. Unfortunately, this aspect has been misunderstood in some quarters, and Costello himself has made rather exaggerated claims of its originality. Some reviewers have misinterpreted Costello's book as an effort to revive the charges made in the 1940's and 1950's that President Roosevelt deliberately "provoked" the Pacific War, and, knowing in advance of the Pearl Harbor attack, sacrificed the Pacific Fleet as a pawn to get us into the European war. But Costello explicitly disassociates himself from this notion. He argues instead that in November 1941 the Roosevelt administration was more certain that war was coming than has been thought, and that it probably even had access to *elements* of Japan's war plan, which the British allegedly obtained. However, it did not know of the Pearl Harbor attack—which was a super-secret component of the overall plan, known only to a very few insiders. Costello does say, as have many others, that there were clues to the Pearl Harbor attack, which, if properly assembled could have tipped us off to the Japanese plan. Costello strongly suggests that these hints were more evident than has been previously realized, and that responsible persons later concealed some of the clues to protect themselves against criticism for not passing them on to the naval command at Pearl Harbor.

Despite interesting revelations, however, Costello's interpretations are not always reliable, and he sometimes exaggerates their freshness. Contrary to what Costello implies, it has long been known that the Americans were bent on rapidly building a force of strategic bombers in the Philippines to halt Japan's drive to the south and to bomb Japan eventually. This was certainly a key element of prewar strategy in the Pacific, but it is doubtful that it formed part of any coherent Anglo-American "deterrent" strategy in the Pacific during 1941. Actually there was no real Allied coordination or overall plan in the Pacific, despite years of staff talks. Both Britain and the U.S. merely strengthened existing bases in the futile hope that this would be sufficient. The United States was unwilling to make further concessions to Japan or to abandon China, stands that were allowed to overrule considerations of military strategy. It is improbable that the American abandonment of a *modus vivendi* proposal on November 26, 1941, made war "inevitable." As Herbert Feis and others have pointed out, the proposal fell short of the Japanese leaders' minimum aims and would probably have collapsed in a short time even if it had been accepted. Moreover, though a tough line in late 1941 may have been ill-timed, it did not represent the culmination of a quarter of a century of "uncompromising policy," as Costello characterizes our stance in the Far East. Our policy in the face of Japanese agression from 1931 to 1940 was not tough and uncompromising unless tongue-clucking can be called tough. □

# Deplorable Imbalances

**Francis A. Schaeffer: *A Christian Manifesto;*** Crossway Books; Westchester, Illinois.

**by Allan C. Carlson**

Francis A. Schaeffer, the conservative Evangelical theologian, has seen the bloody face of our age. A gentle man, he recoils with horror at the million-plus corpses of unborn American babies annually flushed away as a human sacrifice to "choice." A moral man, he shudders at the spectacle of a nation indulging in an orgy of self-gratification. An honorable man, he despairs over the clever linguistic tricks of Martin E. Marty and other progressive theologians who "brilliantly confuse" Christian truth for ideological ends. ("Why does he do this?" Dr. Schaeffer asks with a childlike sense of betrayal.) A patriotic man, he laments the disintegration of the Judeo-Christian cultural consensus on which this country was built and its replacement in the schools, media, "mainline" churches and courts by an anti-religious, morally bankrupt world view.

Dr. Schaeffer variously labels this alien *Weltanschauung* corrupting the American experiment as "humanistic," "liberal" or "materialistic." It is based, he insists, on the idea "that the final reality is impersonal matter or energy shaped into its present form by impersonal chance." Because of this ideology's cultural victory, he continues, the "form-freedom balance" on which our demo-

*Dr. Carlson is editor of* Persuasion At Work.



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cratic society rested has given way to a bogus "pluralism" and a frivolous "freedom" without any foundation for values or law. Surveying the chaos wrought by the liberal mindset, Dr. Schaeffer tells his fellow Evangelicals "that we are at war, and there are no neutral parties in the struggle." With a heavy heart, he urges them to prepare for civil disobedience in the face of a threatened liberal-humanistic reign of terror.

A regrettable aspect of *A Christian Manifesto* is its Protestant exclusivism. Dr. Schaeffer carefully limits his positive assessment of the religious foundations of a free society to the "Reformation countries" of Northern Europe and North America. While his defense of Protestant history is refreshingly forthright, such lingering sectarian jealousies seem in an age of impending persecution to be a luxury that believers can ill afford. In fact, Dr. Schaeffer's *Manifesto* bears closest resemblance to the antihumanist essays of C.S. Lewis, Malcolm Muggeridge, T.S. Eliot and other modern Catholic writers. Certainly for the coliseum lions which may reappear in the pagan era ahead, religious martyrs will all taste the same, whether Catholic, Protestant, Mormon or Jew. □

## WASTE OF MONEY

# In Search of the Divine

**Tony Schwartz:** ***Media: The Second God;*** Random House; New York.

**by James Warren**

Mr. Schwartz wastes no time invoking the rather coarse metaphor of his title: "Like God," we're told in the first chapter, "radio and television are always with us . . . The media are all-knowing. They supply a community of knowledge and feelings, and a common morality." Mr. Schwartz is disturbingly comfortable with this state of affairs. He seems to wonder why we pretend that we are still bound by the drab communicative processes associated with reading and writing. In Schwartz's view, it is time we paid homage to the technological wizardry of the modern age and accept its presence gracefully.

*Media: The Second God* is provoking—both for its slickly presented half-truths and distortions and for its occasional glimmering insights into the effects of the communications revolution on our society and our politics. Undoubtedly, Schwartz is a very bright fellow. Thus it is surprising that he hasn't more thoroughly considered his arguments. There is not much precision in his claim that "Electricity and its speed have all but eliminated distance and time as factors in communication." What Schwartz means to say is that electricity has made it possible for a single image to be projected to millions of people simultaneously, and he wants us to believe this is a great leap forward, which is debatable, to say the least.

Mr. Schwartz is reluctant to face the larger ramifications of the electronic media. He restricts himself to persuading us to embrace our television sets. He writes: "Electronic replay can be far more effective than the printed word in preventing the distortion of history," as if to suggest we could get at the essence of the human experience if only we had enough cameras to get *everything* on tape. But what good is the miracle of television—that is, the instant dispersal of information—if television erodes and distorts our ability to interpret the world? Schwartz is not blind to these very real, serious problems. He chooses to pay scant attention to them. It can be said that in his interpretation of the electronic media, Schwartz has adopted the flashy, superficial style that characterizes the object of his inquiry. The fluff and the gimickry take precedence over the substantive issues, and marketability is more important than depth. Let's hope that the First God will still hold us in His care. □

*Mr. Warren is on the editorial staff of Facts on File, Inc. in New York City.*

# Rampant Indecency

**Colleen McCullough:** ***An Indecent Obsession;*** Harper & Row; New York.

**by Susan Tunney**

The time is the end of World War II and the place is a mental ward at a military hospital in the South Pacific. The plot is centered on a nurse who falls in love with a patient. This sounds suspiciously like a nursing-adventure story for girls. Basically, it is, except for the generous servings of sex, violence and other amenities of modern fiction.

This superfluous nonsense is entitled *An Indecent Obsession.* The title comes from the gushing observation "that duty, the most indecent of all obsessions, is only another name for love." In a nursing-adventure story that line would read: "She loved nursing." What's so indecent about that? Nothing, but it doesn't sound particularly salacious.

The novel was written by Colleen McCullough, who also penned the best-selling and equally sophisticated *The Thorn Birds.* Ms. McCullough is—after a fashion—capable of sustaining a narrative. However, she's incapable of providing something to think about, as she has virtually nothing to say.

However, judging by the sales of her previous work and the qualities of most books found on the best-seller list, it's obvious that Ms. McCullough has mastered the formula for success. That formula—consisting of nothing more than drivel tinctured with purple prose—is something to think about with dismay.

One comes away from *An Indecent Obsession* with the odd impression of having read not the work of an author, but of someone imitating an author. How is it that this facet of her writing and career has not been noticed by the "critics," reviewers and observers of the literary mass market in this country? How could that respectable disseminator of obligatory opinion-forming slogans, *Publisher's Weekly,* say in its entry: "McCullough shows genuine insight into the plight of her very human and believable characters and her story is very touching"? Isn't the multiple interaction between Ms. McCullough, the American publishers, reviewers-promoters and the reading public a grand theme for an *oeuvre* entitled *An Indecent Obsession?* □

*Ms. Tunney is a free-lance writer living in Washington, D.C.*



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# Best-Selling Poetry & Salable Refuse

***E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial;* Written by Melissa Mathison; Directed by Stephen Spielberg; A Universal Picture.**

***Conan the Barbarian;* Written by John Milius and Oliver Stone; Directed by John Milius; A Universal Release.**

by Stephen Macaulay

In the 19th century, several poets began to feel a sense of doom as the empirical method inexorably encroached upon the realm that was once their private domain. Clouds, for example, were once a billowing turf for castles; they became nothing more than meteorological phenomena to be probed by balloons and measured with barometers. One after another, the enclaves of the poets were ripped open by the scientists. Keats's Grecian urn ultimately became an object for carbon-14 dating. Literature vs. Technology. In many respects, judging by the malaise and exhaustion of most 20th-century poets and the seeming universal dominance of the scientists, Technology wins the bays—but the laurels are now hydroponically grown under sterile conditions.

Initially, moving pictures were of an androgynous nature: technological developments made them possible, but they were used in magic shows. For several years—indeed, throughout most of its history—film has been the new realm for poets and storytellers. But with the emergence of another technological development, television, film began to advance with an eye toward technique at the expense of wonder. That is, the main thing was *how* something was done: CinemaScope, Cinerama, 3-D: these inventions became important; viewers were to be satisfied with pointless panoramas, bobsled rides and balls bounced off of paddles.

*Mr. Macaulay is a frequent contributor to the* Chronicles.

In the 70's, George Lucas and Steven Spielberg became masters of the technological film. Lucas's *Star Wars* and Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* make gestures at storytelling, but still the blue-screen technique and elaborate, carefully crafted models are the real wonders. They are films produced in a computer-controlled autoclave.

With *E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial,* Spielberg has turned the tables. Magic springs forth unbound. Certainly it is a film in the science-fiction genre, but as with all quality science fiction, people, not *life*, is the predominant concern; space ships and energy beams are props and nothing more. In *E.T.,* Spielberg pays homage, sometimes subtly, sometimes obviously, to such wonderful creations as the films of George Melies, J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan,* the film version of *The Wizard of Oz,* and J.R.R. Tolkien's world. But especially *Peter Pan.* Part of the action takes place on Halloween: the night when the faeries come out to play, when magical creatures laugh and run through neighborhoods. Spielberg transforms the sylph Tinker Bell into a little creature from outer space. But still, love, something that can't be expressed in a binary code but is totally manifest in a tear, keeps the enchanted alive.

* * *

Parallels between periods are often drawn to aid in understanding them. A common comparison today is between our age and the 1930's, primarily because of the economic conditions. On a subcultural level there is another similarity: the 30's were the heyday of pulp magazines—*Thrilling Mystery, Terror Tales* and the like. The 10¢ and 15¢ pulps carried stories of a genre called "weird menace," which were presumably crafted for the working man. Children, of course, would get their hands on them when they could. Initially the stories centered on strange occurrences that ultimately had rational explanations: the creeping fungus that decimated townspeople was created by an oil magnate who had discovered oil under the town square and who wanted to drive the people away so that he could exploit it. Those who had large sums of money didn't come off well in this Depression-age fiction. Later, the stories became more escapist, and gruesome happenings were genuinely preternatural. Other variations were the lost-world and earlier-age stories. The covers of the pulps were invariably lurid, showing women—in some state of undress or simply in tatters—being poked,

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stretched, stalked or otherwise tortured or menaced by a malevolent creature—human or not.

In the days when the word *automation* hadn't even been coined, working in a factory was tough. As there wasn't a TV set to escape into and as the 21st Amendment wasn't ratified until 1933, the pulps provided the laborer a modicum of relief after the whistle blew. Although one wouldn't particularly want his child to read the pulps, it wasn't terrible if they did: the stories weren't as lascivious as the covers implied, and the malefactor typically received his just desserts from a just hero.

Today there is a resurgence of this genre. The pulps have been supplanted by the "slicks." However, films have become the real replacements. Whereas the pulps had no pretentions of being anything else but means of withdrawal from drudgery of the assembly line, many of the films array themselves in the Emperor's clothing and announce that they are Important. *Conan the Barbarian*—based on a character created in the 30's—is a rich example. First a quote from Nietzsche rolls up on the screen, and the viewers are advised that whatever doesn't kill them will make them stronger. Such pomposity and fraudulence typify the rest of the film, which glorifies butchery as the means of self-assertion.

Retained from the pulps are the supernatural and gruesome details—a man is transformed into a snake; bodies are boiled in a caldron. The suggestive, sexy covers are replaced with bare skin and enacted suggestions with such a regularity that the director's stopwatch seems to be the only rationale.

The just hero has been dismissed and replaced by an amoral creep. In a low-budget though equally degenerate film that appeared on screens contemporaneously with *Conan* called *The Sword and the Sorcerer*, the protagonist does his stuff only so he can bed the wench who requested the services of his sword. Conan is on par. Just prior to being chopped up by evil-doers led by a black man (the pulps came up with more sophisticated symbolism), Conan's Teutonic father advises his prepubescent son: "There is no one in this world that you can trust—not men, not women, not beasts." He concludes, "This you can trust," and hands him a sword. Later, physically mature and with his father's mental finesse, Conan remarks that the best things in life are to "Crush enemies, see them driven before you and hear the lamentations of their women." And that's precisely what this so-called hero does.

The parallel with the 30's breaks down here: the refined types packing the movie theaters today would have rather faced deadly demons than buy a pulp. But they buy *Conan the Barbarian.* □

## MUSIC

# The Ellington Legacy

**by Stanley Dance**

With the possible exception of Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington was the most widely celebrated musician jazz has known. Great honors were bestowed upon him both at home and abroad, and wherever he went he played to packed houses with enthusiasm. Yet although the most valuable part of his legacy is unquestionably the records he made with his own orchestra, during his lifetime the sales of these records seldom compared with those of some much-inferior artists. The reason for this had partly to do with promotion and partly with the fact that the best of Ellington was never readily assimilable by the masses, which recognized him primarily as a writer of "hit songs." The same problem is reflected even now in the success of the song-and-dance show, *Sophisticated Ladies,* currently playing in New York and Los Angeles, where over thirty of Ellington's compositions are presented in rapid succession. At each theater an excellent orchestra is on stage throughout, but it does little more than provide a brisk background for dancers and rather mediocre singers.

RCA has put out two two-record sets, one by the original cast of the show (CBL2-4053), the other a random, unannotated selection from its immense catalogue of Ellington's recordings (CPL2-4098). CBS, with equally large recorded resources, has also shown relatively little interest. Nothing exists in this country comparable to what has been done by the affiliates of these two companies in France, where practically *everything* of Ellington's to which they have rights is available. There have, however, been tributes and salutes by other groups, some genuine and some clearly opportunistic, not to mention innumerable bootleg albums derived from broadcasts. *Time-Life,* in its *Giants of Jazz* series, has one set devoted to Ellington and one each to two of his most important soloists, Johnny Hodges and Ben Wesbter.

It has been left to the Smithsonian to make an intelligent approach to reissuing Ellington's recorded material. Already released are four two-record sets, each covering a year in his band's history, beginning with 1938 and continuing through 1941. This was a great period that included what many regard as the peak of Ellington's career. In 1940 the band had moved from the Columbia label to Victor, where it benefited from superior recording facilities. Its morale was also uplifted by the arrival of bassist Jimmy Blanton and tenor saxophonist

*Mr. Dance is a jazz historian and the author of* The World of Count Basie.



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Ben Webster. Ellington profited, too, from the collaboration of a young man from Pittsburgh, Billy Strayhorn, who had come to him as a lyricist but who rapidly developed into a first-class composer and arranger. The fresh talent and a new spirit of enthusiasm resulted in a string of masterpieces, among them *Jack the Bear, Ko-Ko, Concerto for Cootie, Cotton Tail, Never No Lament, Bojangles, Harlem Air Shaft* and *Warm Valley.*

An unusual unanimity exists in American critical circles about the importance of the 1938-41 Ellington period. The boxed set, (Smithsonian 2018) is entitled *Explosion of Genius.* There is unquestionably some justification for this, but its emphasis is somehow detrimental to the balance of Ellington's *oeuvre.* From first to last, he continued to come up with captivating and original music. There were brief fallow seasons and occasional failures, but even in the last years, when the band's personnel was ravaged by age and death, when its greatest star, alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges, and Billy Strayhorn were both gone forever, Ellington continued to create orchestral textures unique in jazz. Explosions of genius erupted throughout the entire span of his nearly fifty years at the top.

What might be called his "primitive" period extended from 1924 to 1930. During this time the "jungle" sound was successfully delineated by Bubber Miley and Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, who used a rubber plunger on trumpet and trombone respectively to obtain extraordinary effects. They established the tradition of so-called wah-wah brass that Ellington maintained until his death. At the same time, some novel and arresting instrumental routines were fashioned, among them such durable favorites as *East St. Louis Toodle-oo, Black and Tan Fantasy, Creole Love Call* and *The Mooche.* Ellington learned as he progressed and his band steadily improved as an ensemble. The output up to 1930 certainly merits an album to itself in the Smithsonian series, and the 1930-to-1938 period requires at least two more.

By August 1930, the band was drawing well ahead of its competition. Besides Cootie Williams, who had replaced Bubber Miley, Ellington had exceptional musicians in each section: Joe Nanton, valve trombonist Juan Tizol, Johnny Hodges, clarinetist Barney Bigard, baritone saxophonist Harry Carney, bassist Wellman Braud, drummer Sonny Greer. During the next eight years, some of their most memorable music was produced: *Old Man Blues, Ring Dem Bells, Rockin' in Rhythm, Echoes of the Jungle, Bugle Call Rag, It Don't Mean a Thing, The Sheik, Slippery Horn, Ducky Wucky, Lightnin', Bundle of Blues, Harlem Speaks, In the Shade of the Old Apple Tree, Stompy Jones, Saddest Tale, Showboat Shuffle, Merry-Go-Round, Daybreak Express* and *Echoes of Harlem,* not to mention "hits" like *Mood Indigo, Solitude* and *Sophisticated Lady.* There were also Ellington's first "extended" works—*Creole Rhapsody* and *Reminiscing in Tempo. Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue,* which was written and recorded in 1937, provoked an emotional response at the 1956 Newport Jazz Festival and accounted for both Ellington's best-selling album and his portrait on the cover of *Time.*

For a short 1935 film, Ellington used abbreviated versions of some of these gems from the 1930's, which have been recreated at full length, together with other less familiar compositions, by an orchestra conducted by Gunther Schuller for a Smithsonian set that bears the film's title, *Symphony in Black* (N-024). The work has been faithfully rendered and much care was taken to simulate the original soloists. This falls within the realm of imitation, of course, but the Ellington effect cannot be obtained if its traditional voices are disregarded. Bob Wilber, Art Baron and Jimmy Knepper

## In the Mail

***The Language of Canaan and the Grammar of Feminism*** **by Vernard Eller; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan.** This brief examination of language in the Bible defends the use of words like "man" against "person" and other such revisions.

***The Dominion Covenant: Genesis*** **by Gary North; Institute for Christian Economics; Tyler Texas.** A detailed examination of how the book of Genesis lays the foundations of economics.

***Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, and Novy Mir*** **by Vladimir Lakshin; The MIT Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts.** Lakshin defends himself and Tvardovsky against Solzhenitsyn's portayal of them in *The Oak and the Calf.*

***Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters, 1922 to 1966*** **translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; Grand Rapids, Michigan.** An exchange of friendship and theological views is shown in 44 years of correspondence.

***Lonely Walk: The Life of Senator Mark Hatfield*** **by Robert Eells and Bartell Nyberg; Multnomah Press; Portland, Oregon.** A political biography about the senator from Oregon with an emphasis on the spiritual side.

***Waking Their Neighbors Up: The Nashville Agrarians Rediscovered*** **by Thomas Daniel Young; The University of Georgia Press; Athens.** The story of *I'll Take My Stand:* from genesis to fulfillment and beyond.

***The Hundredth Monkey*** **by Ken Keyes, Jr.; Vision Books; St. Mary, Kentucky.** A "no-nukes" primer complete with large type and a redundant cartoon.



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are quite successful in reproducing Hodges, Nanton and Tizol.

World War II forced many changes in Ellington's personnel, but in 1955 (when Johnny Hodges returned after a few years as a leader and Sam Woodyard, a superior drummer, was acquired) another exciting period began. The new series of innovations took the form of whole albums rather than three-minute performances; among the more notable were *Such Sweet Thunder, The Queen's Suite, Suite Thursday, Afro-Bossa, The Far East Suite, The Latin-American Suite, The New Orleans Suite* and *The Afro-Eurasian Eclipse.* Columbia recently reissued Ellington's music for *Anatomy of a Murder* (JCS-8166). A lesser collection, *The Virgin Islands Suite* (1965), previously released on Reprise, has now made a reappearance under the Discovery label (DS-841). Each of the last two albums contains a masterly performance by Hodges.

Work continued at a furious pace until the end, when Ellington instructed his son on how to complete *The Three Black Kings.* This imaginative work became the subject of an Alvin Ailey ballet and was finally recorded by the Ellington band and the Warsaw Symphony Orchestra, with Mercer Ellington conducting, during a 1977 tour of Poland. The mixing of the live recording leaves much to be desired, but the performance is impressive, nevertheless. The two-record set also contains *The River,* on which Ailey mounted another successful ballet, and an earlier work, *New World a-Comin',* a kind of piano concerto. Adam Makowicz is the soloist on the latter. The album (Frog Box TFB 100/2) isn't widely distributed, but it can be obtained from specialist dealers. While it contains Ellington's last orchestral work, the full extent of his legacy cannot yet be defined, because several albums of unissued material have yet to be released. □

## POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

# More on Education

by Barbara M. Morris

While one would not expect an employee of a public school to endorse Samuel Blumenfeld's *Is Public Education Necessary?,* one *would* expect a fair, scholarly critique from a professor of history. Unfortunately, I do not think that describes Professor George Curtis's condemnation* of the book (*Chronicles of Culture* January/February 1982).

The missing ingredient in the discussion about the disastrous state of public education is an understanding of why things are the way they are. Parents keep trying to "clean up" the mess, not realizing that they are dealing with a cancer that has been metastasizing since the inception of compulsory, state-controlled education in the early 1800's. At long last, that necessary understanding has been provided. To the dismay of the education industry, Samuel Blumenfeld has documented the root of the rot.

Among Blumenfeld's revelations is that the first proponents of government-dictated education were more than the "strong-minded reformers" Dr. Curtis calls them. They were, rather, agents who recognized that in order to bring about a socialist state, there would have to be a vehicle euphemistically called "public schools" which would ultimately change and/or develop "correct" thinking that would serve the state. This is the essence of what Mr. Blumenfeld has carefully and painstakingly documented.

Dr. Curtis argues that Mr. Blumenfeld's ". . . excursion into American history is so patently adversarial that his hypotheses become vulnerable to any attack which utilizes contrary evidence." But Dr. Curtis does not offer a shred of "contrary evidence." Mr. Blumenfeld's documentation shows that the birth of public education was a painful ordeal resisted by individualist citizens. Blumenfeld explains that in 1839 Horace Mann launched a series of articles for professionals in which he urged them to put their children in public schools. This ran contrary to the thinking of parents who were in disagreement with Mann's premise that "education" was intended to reform the character of men in order to create a new society free of competition. Parents were chided for wanting to keep their children separate from the district schools where, admittedly, "some of the scholars are addicted to profanity and obscenity. . ." Parents were advised that it was their "duty" to put their children

in schools where they would associate "with the children of the poor and vicious at some period or other . . . "

Blumenfeld relates how a practical

*Ms. Morris issues* The Barbara M. Morris Report *in California.*

*Dr. Curtis's review was in the "In Focus" department, and he expressed his reservations about rather than condemnation of Mr. Blumenfeld's approach.—Ed.



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middle class was given the hard sell. *Common School Journal* informed the citizenry: "Our fathers encountered the perils of the ocean, and endured the privations of a wilderness, nay, they suffered and died for the great cause of equality . . ." Surely, no student of history would require any comment on this outright fabrication. Today the hard sell is no softer; the deceit, lies and chicanery are no less prevalent.

Acceptance of public education has become so ingrained in the American psyche that the average citizen—and even those who ought to know better—firmly believes there could not possibly be any other workable system; the idea of free enterprise in education escapes all understanding. While Mr. Blumenfeld does not campaign for free-market education, it seems to me that his documentation makes it clear that there is no other alternative to the mess that is called "public education." □

## The American Proscenium

### *Poor John Wilkes Booth*

John Hinckley, Jr., who tried to assassinate President Reagan in the presence of dozens of people, and in plain sight of the entire American nation, has been declared innocent by an American court and jury. This confirms our suspicions: the courts have become the captives of psychiatry, a shady power which, over the last half-century, has succeeded in enslaving the American legal process, public opinion and democratically elected governmental bodies.

The psychiatrists' argument on Hinckley's behalf was that, at the moment of the attempted murder, he did not understand what he was doing. An enormous amount of evidence to the contrary—both factual and objective—was presented in the courtroom. But today neither empiricism nor fundamental morals are sufficient against the might of psychiatric platitudes. It's now obvious that no one is exempt from the horrors inflicted on this society by the alliance of fanatical scientism and freakish pseudo-humanitarianism—neither an innocent waiter nor a President. We are quite certain that someday we'll hear once more from Mr. Jack Abbott (whom we have discussed in previous issues) and Mr. Hinckley, the white knights of knowledge gone berserk.

The venality of lawyers was already old hat in 15th-century France, when *La Farce de Maistre Pierre Pathelin* was staged. When the principle of law became the sacrosanct glue of Western civilization and the ultimate measure of order and justice in parliamentary democracies, endless possibilities for sophism became available to lawyers. We continue to believe in the necessity of having professionals to interpret the law, but their credibility has been greatly impaired by the last two centuries of philosophy and literature. Now, relief is in sight: for decades psychiatrists have been ravaging every cogent notion of free will, sin, vice and moral responsibility—which removes a lot of odium from laywers.

The venality of psychiatrists is of very recent vintage, but, by the very nature of his vocation, the psychiatrist is the vociferous enemy of any moral code or normative ethics—religious or secular. He is a rabid zealot of his *findings,* which he places beyond any touchstone of good or evil. As such, he is an implacable enemy of Lord Shaftsbury's *moral sense.* If this sense is extirpated from human souls by judicial verdicts grounded in psychiatric madness, no organized society will be able to survive.

Poor John Wilkes Booth. Had he been born a century later, he would not have needed to perish in a burning barn. A contemporary, well-paid lawyer in a close working relationship with a team of garrulous psychiatrists would have had him off the hook in any Washington, D.C. court of our time.

### *Political Philosophy*

Now that the Reagan administration's two department officials who are charged with dealing with the outside world—the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense—are both former top executives of the Bechtel Corporation, perhaps we can finally come to grips with one of the crucial questions of American political philosophy. Is what's good for General Motors good for America? Or—is what's good for America good for General Motors? The Bechtel Group, Inc., a highly esteemed partner of the richest House on earth—the House of Saud, something of a tribal corporation—has now become a catalyst for the examination of one of the most elusive enigmas ever to oppress the American mind.

### *ERA to RIP*

Mr. David Broder, a *Washington Post* columnist, enjoys the reputation of being an intelligent man. His eulogy for the ERA makes us wonder why. In it, he makes the point that the ERA's demise meant a defeat for women, but that they will rise from the ashes and resurrection will follow through "political power." This sounds as if the ERA were an issue dividing *women* (a solid homogeneous bloc of humans) from all others in America, e.g. men, children, plants, cattle, computers, etc.—that is, all not categorized as *women.* As anyone who has read newspapers and watched TV over the last ten years can easily recognize, the ERA was trounced by women (Mrs. Schlafly, Eagle Forum and count-



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less other anti-ERA activists all over the country) who, if we were to believe Mr. Broder's implications, apparently are not *women*. Actually, it was men, according to the polls, who were, in their majority, firmly pro-ERA. We know little about the attitudes of children and house pets.

The ERA went down to defeat not because of its substance but because of its image, failing because it became associated with the antinormative ontology and ethics of radical feminism, the permissive subculture of the 1960's and with the elitist behavioral left. As such, it had to be eliminated. Any attempt to revive it with the same rhetoric and in the same sociocultural ambiance is likely to meet the same end.

### *Commerce and Culture*

In June, the American Enterprise Institute held a round-table (actually a square formed by tables) conference on the above subject. The interconnection between commerce and culture was debated for a day and a half under the courteous, yet firm and insightful, stewardship of Messrs. Michael Novak and Stephen Miller. People from Johns Hopkins, Columbia, Chicago University, the Universities of Virginia, Massachusetts and Maryland and other prestigious sites of higher learning participated, as did representatives from assorted journals of intellectual research and cultural sophistication—*Commentary, The New Criterion, Newsweek, This World, Chronicles of Culture.* It was a lively and edifying discourse between gentlemen-scholars, and it affirmed that the bonds between commerce and culture are multiple, complex, seminal, mutually beneficial and firmly grounded in the history of mankind. No one, however, provided a clear answer as to whether a contemporary New York mainstream (*read* liberal) publisher would buy, print and promote a novel about a captain of industry (e.g. capitalist, businessman, entrepreneur) with a heart of gold—a question which seems to us essential in the context of the wisdom and knowledge generated at the conference. □

concept of human rights is the right to squat on a carpet in the royal palace and eat shish kebab with various crown princes. Mr. Dutton claims that he assumed this duty only to defend the sacred principle of evenhandedness in America's foreign policy; the fact that he is being paid millions for his heroic exertions has nothing to do with the nobleness of his intentions.

We would speculate that the Joint Chiefs of Staff are privately delighted at the opportunity to observe the Israeli-manned American-built F-16's in action against the Soviet weapon systems. In public, of course, they arrogantly castigate Mr. Begin's policies, forgetting that according to *our* tradition, on-duty military personnel are forbidden to express publicly political opinions. Whereas the Pope, a man of unquestioned honesty, decency and intelligence, has yet to mention the fact that the Israelis are the only forces that can relieve the Maronite Christians from their dire predicament. In Polish, such silence is called "to have a lot of water in one's mouth." □

## JOURNALISM

## The Lebanon Obfuscation

As if the situation in Lebanon were not sufficiently confusing, the taking of sides here at home verges on hell'z-a-poppin. *Time* magazine was bitterly anti-Israeli without being able to shape its own sullenness into a cogent argument: one could feel that beneath *Time's* feelings lurks something more mysterious than the pursuit of reportorial truth and the quest for political justice. In glaring contrast, the *Wall Street Journal,* whose very nature might prompt one to suspect some discreet connection with such a hub of modern financial opulence as the Saudis, was rabidly pro-Israel. Does this mean that at the very bottom, where ideology and morality converge, the organ of corporate financiers is pure at heart while *Time,* the journalistic conscience of The Middlebrow Super Powers That Be, is motivated by greed and impure investments? No one knows, but there's plenty to think about. It's also worthy of mention that *The New Republic*, a staunchly pro-Israeli organ, recently featured a delightful profile of Mr. Frederick G. Dutton, the symbol and shining light of the Kennedy-McGovern wing of the Democratic Party. Mr. Dutton is now a registered foreign agent and ardent lobbyist for the Saudi kingdom, where the

## The Proliferation of Punks

The subtle distinction between the terms "new wave" and "punk," we have been advised, is that the former is applied to things with a certain anti-chic that haven't made it into the mainstream while the latter refers to the same that have. As far as journals go, *Rolling Stone* is new wave and the *New York Times* punk. Or so we thought. Peter Bonanni, newly hired publisher of *Rolling Stone,* told *Advertising Age:*

> I know this sounds odd, but *Rolling Stone* has a lot in common with the *New York Times. Rolling Stone* has the same commitment and intimacy with its audience—and that audience's respect—that the *New York Times* has.

Funny, he's right. □



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